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Asian and European Paradigms

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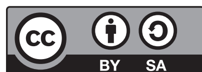

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SPECIAL ISSUE
HUMANISM, POST-HUMANISM AND TRANSHUMANISM IN TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE:
Asian and European Paradigms

Editor's Foreword

Introduction: Humanism, Post-Humanism and Transhumanism in the Transcultural Context of Europe and Asia

Jana S. ROŠKER

Chief editor of Asian Studies

This issue of *Asian Studies* delves into the challenges inherent to humanity and the human condition. Over the course of centuries, these challenges have laid the groundwork for conceptual frameworks commonly referred to as humanism, which have undergone development within a multitude of cultural contexts. Numerous analyses and critiques of these frameworks can be found in many papers contained in this issue, especially regarding the dynamics between humans and non-humans. These discussions have arisen from various regions around the globe, often labeled as post-humanism and transhumanism, among others.

Humanism is often described as a discourse based on the idea that the human being is the measure of all things, often referring to the saying of the pre-Socratic Protagoras, known in philosophy as the *homo mensura* thesis. But is the human being really the measure of all things? Even if this were once true, it is certainly no longer the case today, or only to a very limited extent. We live in an era of neoliberal economic monoculture in which most of our activities, even if they belong to the realm of pure artistic or theoretical creativity, are evaluated on the basis of the financial criterion of profit, which is fast becoming the most important and almost the only standard of social justification (Rugelj 2021, 116). As the Italian philosopher and writer Nuccio Ordine points out (see Šček 2021, 3), the fundamental problem of the 21st century is a humanistic one—we are trying to get rid of man! And as a counterbalance to a world without man, Ordine offers an ancient prescription: "Not less, more humanity will save the world" (ibid.). But a world without human beings, guided by an entrepreneurial and anti-humanist ideology, is also reflected in the contemporary education system, which is the only one that could offer the younger generation (those on whom this world is actually supposed to be based) not only knowledge, but also qualitative insight into the meaning of freedom and autonomy. But of course the aim of teaching and study programs is not to create free people, but to "sell degrees to customers who buy degrees" (ibid.). The logic of enterprise does not produce cultured citizens, but

professional experts for the labor market" (ibid., 5). The entrepreneurial logic does not need historical memory, nor intellectual exchanges that go beyond the narrow confines of national and utilitarian economic interests and therefore make a person truly human. But it is precisely the loss of memory and of the possibility of intercultural dialogues that is a dangerous phenomenon, which sooner or later—unless we humans decide otherwise—will deal humanism a final, fatal blow. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the greatest contribution of Renaissance humanism was precisely to rescue Europe's ancient past from oblivion and to integrate it into the foundations of the new age and modernity.

However, this issue starts from the premise that the traditional European concept of humanism is outdated in its present form and can therefore no longer serve as the conceptual basis of modern, technologically and socially highly differentiated and globalized societies. At the threshold of the third millennium, the related idea of the autonomous subject, which took shape in 17th-century Europe in the development of Enlightenment thought, has often been questioned because it was based on the notion of an abstract, isolated, supposedly self-sufficient individual self that was posited in an unbearable anthropocentric position, conquering and exploiting both non-human beings and nature as such. It has also often been pointed out (see, e.g., Hohmann 2021) that the subject-object distinction has functioned both as an organizing principle and as a clear separation since the Enlightenment. In today's complex and interconnected world, entities must therefore be seen as entangled and intra-active. There is no subject versus object, but rather alliances that shift, merge, and are unstable, and whose agency is subject to constant change (ibid., 12). In this context, many contemporary theorists (e.g. Demenchonok 2009) also problematize the idea of the supposed universality of human rights, which was based on the Enlightenment conceptualization of the subject based on the notion of universal necessity. Hence, in this outdated form, the conceptualization of the human rights can no longer serve as a suitable discourse that can provide an axiological framework for human action and the meaning of human existence.

Human rights, of course, remain a crucial concept that defines humanity. However, it is important to acknowledge that the current framework of human rights is limited in its scope, as it is still rooted in a Eurocentric and post-colonial axiological framework. This framework provides normative standards for evaluating humanism and human beings that do not necessarily reflect the diversity of human experiences. Thus, it is imperative to broaden and expand the concept of human rights to encompass a wider range of human experiences that go beyond the abstract and isolated individual. This expanded framework should also recognize the importance of communities, relationships, and attitudes towards non-human

beings. In essence, the ethics and axiology that underlie the contemporary idea of human rights need to be re-examined, expanded, and modified.

It is important to clarify that broadening and expanding the concept of human rights does not suggest that we should neglect or overlook the plight of any human being, including the most isolated, lonely and marginalized political prisoners, or those living in unjust and unequal conditions that undermine their fundamental human rights. Every person's life is priceless, and it is crucial to persist in advocating for human rights while remaining mindful of the fundamental significance of upholding the dignity and well-being of all individuals.

On the other hand, we must not forget on this way that the ideas of subjectivity and humanism belong to the central axiological foundations of modernization and represent an important part of the European heritage of ideas, on which the spiritual, legal and ideological paradigms of modern social systems are still based.

There is therefore a danger that even those aspects of humanism, autonomy and the free subject which have proved their absolutely positive and progressive charge in the course of historical developments will be drowned in the flood of utilitarian neoliberal discourses, which, because of the increasing diffusion of the concept of the subject, all the more easily put the material laws of market developments before the integrity and dignity of the human being as an individual who, by virtue of its being, is embedded in a social community and in his natural environment (Dirlik 2003, 276–77). Both humanism and the autonomy of the subject on which it is based are axiological preconditions for the preservation, enhancement and development of egalitarian social systems based on a balance between humanity and nature (Nelson 2023, 40). Indeed, egalitarian social systems based on a structure of social justice and ecological awareness are the fundamental prerequisites that enable this kind of integrity and quality of human life (Böhme 2008, 22–26). Therefore, the concepts that maintain and develop such integrity and quality need to be revitalized, updated and adapted to the needs of our times (Lee 2014, 7). In today's globalized world, they need to be placed in a fruitful relational, dialogical and dialectical relationship with similar and related heritages of non-European cultures (e.g. Sernelj 2014; Chai 2023). This relation, however, reveals the power inequalities that underlie attempts to include culturally marginalized bodies of thought within established disciplines (Burik 2023) and raises issues relevant to the globalization of knowledge. In this context, this issue focuses on the exploration of Chinese (and partly also on Japanese and Vietnamese) culture and philosophy.

The issue is ordered into four sections. It opens with a section elaborating on digital technology and artificial intelligence in transcultural, Chinese-Western

perspective. In the first contribution, Paul D'Ambrosio writes about "AI Ethics Beyond the Anglo-Analytic Approach: Humanistic Contributions from Chinese Philosophy". The author argues that classical Chinese philosophy provides valuable insights for addressing the human-centered challenges in AI. Instead of advocating for mathematical solutions or conceptualizing individuals, emotions, agency, and ethics in rigid and mechanistic terms, Chinese philosophy emphasizes the concepts of transformation, interconnectedness, and interdependent growth. By programming and utilizing AI in ways that do not oversimplify the complexities and conflicts of the world, we can leverage it as a tool to comprehend and navigate this complexity—an approach rooted in humanistic values. In this regard, Chinese philosophy can serve as a valuable and collaborative ally.

The second paper in this section is Jana S. Rošker's "Dissolution of the Self: Digital Technology, Privacy and Intimacy in Europe and the Sinophone Region". Her article investigates the correlation between digital technology and the concepts of privacy and intimacy in both Europe and the East Asian region, with specific attention given to the evolving nature and understanding of human personhood.

The second section of this issue delves into the diverse connections between human and non-human entities. It comprises four papers, starting with a contribution by Hans-Georg Moeller titled "Early Confucian 'Human Supremacy' and Its Daoist Critique". Moeller shows how and why numerous Daoist works, particularly the *Zhuangzi*, contain numerous narratives that embody a Daoist perspective challenging the notion of "humanist supremacy" and, more specifically, its implications in sociopolitical and moral contexts. The paper clearly shows that this Daoist anti-humanism is part of a broader endeavor aimed at fostering a state of human tranquility and well-being, prioritizing therapeutic aspects over ideological ones.

In the next paper titled "The Impact of China's Biopolitical Approach to Covid-19 on Pets", Thomas William Whyke, Joaquin Lopez Mugica, Sadia Jamil and Aiqing Wang utilize the concepts of biopower and uses and gratifications theory to analyze the treatment of pets in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research focuses on a specific incident of a COVID-19 corgi killing carried out by a health worker in Shanghai and examines its reception on social media platforms. The findings indicate that the strong negative response on Weibo towards the corgi killing can be attributed to the influence of biopower, which prioritizes human life over animal welfare within China's COVID-19 approach. Consequently, social media has played a crucial role in empowering animal advocates and involving them in the emergency management of pets.

This paper is followed by Gloria Luque-Moya's article "Toward a Harmonic Relationship between Humans and Nature: A Humanist Reinterpretation of Early Confucian Philosophy". In response to the pressing environmental crisis, the author puts forth a proposal to revive early Confucian philosophy as a means to cultivate a more desirable approach to our interaction with the environment. Early Confucianism embraces a humanistic perspective that advocates for a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Consequently, this article aims to delineate a unique outlook on nature and the role of humans that is evident in early Confucianism, with the intention of reevaluating and addressing our present ecological concerns.

The subsequent paper is titled "Why the Chinese Tradition Had No Concept of "Barbarian": The Mercurial Nature of the Human and Non-Human in Chinese Metaphysics". It's author is Xiang Shuchen, who contends that Chinese metaphysical thought, in contrast to the ancient Greek tradition, is rooted in a process-oriented paradigm that highlights the interconnectedness of all "things" with their ever-changing environment. A significant consequence of this perspective is that the distinction between the human and non-human realms is much more fluid. According to the Confucian viewpoint, an individual only truly embodies their humanity through the process of acculturation, wherein one's growth is shaped by participation in public symbolic practices. This transformative journey molds individuals into socially-oriented beings who consider the needs of others. Unlike the Greek tradition, which distinguished between the civilized and the barbarian, the Chinese tradition does not apply the concept of the "barbarian" due to its recognition of the continuous and evolving nature of humanness, and the importance of acculturation.

The fourth section of this issue deals with political theory and ethics in the context of humanism, post-humanism and transhumanism in China. It opens with Richard Stone's article "The Politics of Pure Experience: Individual and State in *An Inquiry into the Good*". The author explores the political implications inherent in Nishida Kitaro's theory of pure experience as presented in *An Inquiry into the Good*. His analysis is a response to the diverse and contrasting claims made about the political meaning and risks associated with Nishida's early philosophy. The author contends that while it is prudent to approach such claims with caution and consideration, a balanced evaluation reveals that Nishida's early philosophy was essentially apolitical. Nevertheless, Stone goes on to argue that being apolitical does not imply that Nishida's work lacks political consequences. On the contrary, the defining feature of Nishida's early political philosophy is its ability to enable readers to transcend political issues.

This paper is followed by Maja Maria Kosec's contribution, titled "Humanization of Chinese Religion: From Heaven (*tian* 天) to Ritual (*li* 礼) in Xu Fuguan and Li Zehou". This article offers a critical comparison between the interpretations of Li Zehou and Xu Fuguan regarding the emergence of new religious and moral concepts and beliefs during the period spanning from the Shang to the Western Zhou dynasty. The author elucidates the factors underlying the significant divergences in their approaches and demonstrates that these disparities primarily stem from fundamental differences in Li's and Xu's respective methodologies. Furthermore, the author contends that these divergences underscore the significance of comprehending diverse methodological approaches, as they facilitate a more profound and intricate comprehension of the process of humanization within Chinese religion.

The next paper, "A Humanist Reading of Wang Chong's Defence of Divination", was written by Mark Kevin Cabural. The author presents a fresh perspective on the ideas of Wang Chong by incorporating Chung-Ying Cheng's understanding of inclusive or intrinsic humanism. Specifically, the author highlights how this form of humanism is evident in Wang Chong's advocacy for divination. Furthermore, the author delves into the significance of onto-cosmological humility in divination and inclusive humanism, while also examining how this disposition or virtue is reflected in contemporary scientific literature. By proposing a humanist interpretation of Wang Chong's defence of divination, the author not only suggests a novel perspective but also asserts that onto-cosmological humility can serve as a guiding principle for responsible actions and personal transformation. This extends to the way humans interact with other beings and the universe as a whole.

The last section of this issue is titled "Comparative Approaches" and it comprises two contributions. The first one is titled "Marxist Anthropology Through the Lens of Philosophy of Language: Engels, Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao on the Origin of Humankind and Human Language" and was written by Yang Xiaobo. The author highlights the Marxist perspective that distinguishes human beings from animals based on their ability to create and utilize tools, which is closely connected to the development of language and consciousness. Within Marxist anthropology, there is an effort to trace the origin of humanity by examining the emergence of tools, language, and consciousness. This approach encompasses a philosophical dimension concerning language. By exploring and comparing the hypotheses of Engels, Li Zehou, and the Vietnamese scholar Tran Duc Thao regarding the origins of humankind and human language, Yang's article aims to offer fresh insights into Marxist anthropology from the perspective of the philosophy of language.

This special issue concludes with Mateusz Janik's article "On Small and Large Vessels: Anthropological Difference According to Matteo Ricci and Zhu Xi", in which the author undertakes a comparative analysis of Song Neo-Confucian and late Ming Jesuit perspectives regarding the exceptional nature of human beings and the involvement of non-human entities in shaping the discursive foundations of anthropological distinctions. The focus lies on the arguments put forth by Zhu Xi and Matteo Ricci, both advocating for the notion of human exceptionalism. The paper is grounded in a historical context, considering the unique encounter between Jesuit missionaries and the Confucian tradition in China. This encounter brought together the scholastic tradition, influenced by Aristotle's philosophy, and Confucian teachings. Across Chinese and Western philosophical discourses, the concept of the non-human other has played a significant role in defining the very essence of humanity.

In conclusion, this special issue on *Humanism, Post-Humanism, and Transhumanism in Transcultural Perspective: Asian and European Paradigms* has offered a diverse and comprehensive exploration of these complex philosophical concepts. Through the lens of transcultural perspectives, the contributors have delved into the intersections and divergences between Asian and European paradigms. As we have seen, the articles presented in this special issue have shed light on various aspects, ranging from the historical development of humanistic thought to the ethical implications of post-humanist and transhumanist ideas. By examining the works of prominent thinkers from different cultural backgrounds, this special issue has provided a platform for critical analysis, fostering a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of humanism and its evolution into post-humanist and transhumanist discourses.

Moreover, this special issue has underscored the importance of considering cultural diversity and contextual factors when engaging with these philosophical frameworks. It has demonstrated the rich tapestry of ideas that emerge when transcultural perspectives are taken into account, allowing for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to the study of humanism, post-humanism, and transhumanism. By bringing together Asian and European paradigms, this special issue has contributed to the ongoing dialogue on the nature of humanity, the boundaries of human potential, and the ethical implications of emerging technologies. It is our hope that the insights gained from this collection of articles will inspire further research, fostering cross-cultural understanding and interdisciplinary collaboration in the realm of humanistic studies.

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SPECIAL ISSUE HUMANISM, POST-HUMANISM AND TRANSHUMANISM IN TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: Asian and European Paradigms

Digital Technologies and Artificial Intelligence

AI Ethics Beyond the Anglo-Analytic Approach: Humanistic Contributions from Chinese Philosophy

*Paul D'AMBROSIO**

Abstract

That artificial intelligence (AI), algorithms, and related technologies could use a few good booster shots of "humanism" is widely apparent. In both program code and implementation, AI and algorithms have been accused of harbouring deep-seated flaws that conflict with human values. They are prime examples of the skew towards white, Western, men and demonstrate the bankruptcy in the face of neoliberalist, profit- and market-oriented social paradigms that this special issue seeks to address.

Currently, computer scientists and AI researchers who are looking to remedy these problems are often in favour of more data, more powerful machines, more complex algorithms—in short, that we should fix problems with AI by building better AI. In this view human beings and the world can be modelled in code—our lives, interactions, society, and our very selves can be broken down into data points which can be assessed by highly advanced technologies. When these scientists and researchers seek to broaden their approach they often look to philosophy. However, the philosophy they look to is overwhelmingly Anglo-analytic, which views the world in extremely similar ways. Both AI and Anglo-analytic philosophy argue for solutions to humanistic problems which are essentially mathematical. They share in seeing important concepts, such as persons, emotions, agency, and ethics, as mechanistic, atomistic, and calculable.

In this paper I will argue that Classical Chinese philosophy offer insightful resources for addressing the humanist problems in AI. Rather than arguing for mathematical solutions, or envisioning persons, emotions, agency, and ethics, as other rigid, atomistic, and mechanistic approaches, Chinese philosophy emphasizes transformation, interrelatedness, and correlative developments. Accordingly, it offers tools for appreciating the world, society, and ourselves as spontaneous, complex, and full of tension. AI can be programmed and used in ways that do not reduce the complexity and conflict in the world, but provide us instead with tools to make sense of it—tools that are humanistic in nature. To this end, Chinese philosophy can be a helpful collaborative partner.

Keywords: AI, algorithms, Chinese philosophy, humanism, machine learning, Confucianism, Daoism, comparative philosophy

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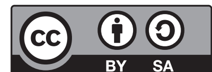

Etika umetne inteligence onkraj angloanalitičnega pristopa: humanistični prispevki kitajske filozofije

Izvleček

Da bi umetna inteligenca (UI), algoritmi in sorodne tehnologije potrebovali nekaj dobrih injekcij »humanizma«, je splošno znano. Tako samim programskim kodam kot tudi načinu uporabe se očita, da se v njihovi zasnovi skrivajo nekatere globoko zakoreninjene pomanjkljivosti, ki so v nasprotju s človeškimi vrednotami. So najboljši primeri tehnologije, ki služi belim zahodnim moškim, in s tem kažejo na bankrot vsakršnih naprednih načel, saj podpirajo razvoj neoliberalističnih, k dobičku in trgu usmerjenih družbenih paradigem, ki jih skuša obravnavati ta posebna številka.

Računalničarji in raziskovalke umetne inteligence, ki želijo odpraviti te težave, se trenutno pogosto zavzemajo za več podatkov, zmogljivejše stroje, kompleksnejše algoritme – menijo skratka, da bi morali težave z umetno inteligenco odpraviti tako, da bi ustvarili boljšo umetno inteligenco. V takšnem razumevanju naj bi bilo možno tako ljudi kot tudi ves svet modelirati v kodah; naša življenja, naše interakcije, družbo, v kateri živimo, in nas same je možno razdeliti na podatkovne enote, ki jih je z naprednimi tehnologijami mogoče vrednotiti. Toda ko te znanstvenice in raziskovalci želijo svoj pristop razširiti, se pogosto obrnejo na filozofijo. Vendar je filozofija, ki jo iščejo, večinoma angloanalitična, torej taka, ki na svet gleda na zelo podobne načine. Tako umetna inteligenca kot angloanalitična filozofija zagovarjata rešitve humanističnih problemov, ki so v bistvu matematične. Pomembne pojme, kot so osebe, čustva, delovanje in etika, vidita kot mehanistične, atomistične in izračunljive.

V tem prispevku bom pokazal, da klasična kitajska filozofija ponuja prodorne vire za reševanje humanističnih problemov na področju umetne inteligence. Namesto da bi zagovarjala matematične rešitve ali si osebe, čustva, delovanje in etiko predstavljala v luči togih, atomističnih in mehanističnih pristopov, kitajska filozofija poudarja preoblikovanje, medsebojno povezanost in korelativen razvoj. V skladu s tem ponuja orodja za vrednotenje sveta, družbe in nas samih kot spontanih in hkrati kompleksnih bitij, ki so polna napetosti. UI je mogoče programirati in uporabljati na načine, ki sicer sami po sebi ne zmanjšujejo zapletenosti in konfliktov v svetu, vendar nam lahko zagotovijo možnosti razumevanja le-teh. Tovrstne možnosti so že po svoji naravi humanistične. V ta namen je lahko kitajska filozofija koristna disciplina, ki nam lahko pomaga naučiti se sodelovanja s svetom in s soljudmi.

Ključne besede: konfucijanstvo, daoizem, primerjalna filozofija, kitajska filozofija, humanizem, strojno učenje

Introduction

Problems in AI ethics today are largely clustered around various biases, the enforcement of self-fulfilling prophesies, and goals prioritizing neoliberalist, profit- and market-oriented concerns. One of the earliest and to date most systematic studies of these issues is Cathy O'Neill's path-breaking *Weapons of Math Destruction* (2016). Summarizing these critical sentiments, the subtitle to her book reads: *How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*. O'Neill's work calls for a reorientation towards more humanistic uses of data, algorithms, and the AI that relies on them. Dispelling the implicit assumption that because math and science are involved AI must be objective, she writes:

> Big Data processes codify the past. They do not invent the future. Doing that requires moral imagination, and that's something only humans can provide. We have to explicitly embed better values into our algorithms, creating Big Data models that follow our ethical lead. Sometimes that will mean putting fairness ahead of profit. (O'Neill 2016, 204)

Following O'Neill's lead many other data scientists have joined the call to "explicitly embed better values" into the programs that constitute AI, and various other algorithmic based tools being used on a daily basis. Research in widely disparate areas have come to the similar conclusions: technology largely mirrors the human thinking that creates, uses, and feeds it.[1]

For example, facial recognition software is notoriously skewed towards certain races, sexes, and genders.[2] Biases are also built into many other technologies in surprisingly simplistic ways.[3] Even seemingly objective AI tools, such as search engines, are deeply embedded with "data discrimination". As Safiya Umoja Noble (s.d.) shows, there is a "culture of racism and sexism in the way discoverability is created online". And "codification of the past" creates "feedback loops" which

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1 "Feeds" here refers to big data, which is the "raw material" of nearly all AI today. Much of this big data is reliant, in one way or another, on observations of human behaviour. How exactly this is read, however, is to a large extent completely and necessarily determined by human programmers.

2 Some of the leading scholars in these areas include Joy Buolamwini (2019), Safiya Noble (2018), and Timnit Gebru (2020).

3 Lex Fridman relates a somewhat minor example, but one which shows just how prevalent and how blind many AI researchers and programmers can be. He describes working on technology to allow users to bypass password protections by identifying the unique way they pull their phones out of their pockets. Working on a team, Fridman and several colleagues were beginning to get satisfied with their progress when a female co-worker pointed out "many women don't have pockets, and carry their phones in their purse" (Fridman 2022, 104:15).

curate everything from social media to predictive policing.[4] Focusing on the latter, Sarah Byrne writes:

> Predictive algorithms hold up a mirror to the past, and project into the future. If historical biases and police practices inform where and whom the police surveilled in the past, they will also shape where and from whom cops collect the crime data that is fed into policing algorithms to generate those risk scores. It is a self-fulfilling statistical prophesy. (Byrne 2020, 16:30)

That much of the time, energy, and money is geared towards profit goes far beyond advertising tricks and ploys to attract attention.[5] Our entire economy has begun to shift towards what Shoshana Zuboff calls "surveillance capitalism", which mines "human experience as free raw materials for translation into behavioral data" (Zuboff 2018, 8).[6]

Dealing with these issues would make AI more "humanistic"—if by this we mean better aligning technology with our values. This requires thinking about AI and technology in somewhat unfamiliar ways, i.e. looking outside of ways AI itself currently operates, or at the very least changing our relationship to this technology. Otherwise, we risk merely patching up a few problems or fixing some things while messing others up. Indeed, this is already implied in what O'Neill, Noble, and Byrne identify as the main issue: further drawing on resources which reflect the method and content we already use might only lead to further codification of the very biases and practices we are trying to avoid.

The dominant approach in addressing AI-related issues today, and one that more or less mirrors how AI programs are already constructed, is Anglo-analytic philosophy[7]. Methodologically, as well as in terms of basic assumptions about key concepts

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4 Cathy O'Neill also investigates the algorithms used to inform recidivism assessments. These models, O'Neill demonstrates, "codify prejudices and penalize the poor" (O'Neill 2016, 210). Moreover, she along with many others have definitively shown that biases are rampant in credit card companies, insurance rates, *résumé sorting, mortgage assessments,* or basically anytime any algorithm is used. Brian Christian's *Alignment Problem* (2020) also discusses many of these issues in detail.

5 Tim Wu's *The Attention Merchants* (2016) and Joseph Turow's *The Aisles Have Eyes* (2017) give excellent discussions of these issues.

6 Or, as Wikipedia describes: "Surveillance capitalism is an economic system centered around the capture and commodification of personal data for the core purpose of profit-making," (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surveillance_capitalism (accessed November 21, 2022)).

7 The description of Anglo-analytic philosophy given here does not claim to represent the entire tradition—nor would that ever be possible. What is of interest is "Anglo-analytic philosophy" in two general senses: first, the type of philosophical resources utilized by people who develop or theorize about AI, and second, the general approach of Anglo-analytic philosophy. Much of this

including persons, emotions, agency, and ethics as well as understandings of meaning, AI and Anglo-analytic philosophy are quite similar.[8] Unsurprisingly, communication between AI researchers and Anglo-analytic philosophers is extremely easy and common—and that is because the not-so-distant cousins are speaking dialects of the same language. However, Chinese philosophy provides a great resource on both counts. It runs counter to the way AI and Anglo-analytic philosophy thinks about persons, emotions, agency, ethics and meaning, and methodologically, what counts in Chinese philosophy (e.g. how arguments are made) and even what issues are discussed, is quite different from Anglo-analytic philosophy as well. But perhaps most importantly, already by looking to something as different as classical Chinese philosophy, AI research would necessarily embody an orientation toward reflecting on the unfamiliar in unaccustomed ways. This is precisely what is needed.[9]

This paper thereby seeks to explore ways in which Chinese philosophical methods and concepts could contribute to rethinking AI research, programming, and implementation in more humanistic ways. The paper will be broken down into four main parts. In the first section ("Methods") we will compare some of the differences between the similar approaches shared in Anglo-analytic philosophy and AI with the Chinese tradition. The second section ("Technology and Tradition") will examine the call for humanism in the *Age of AI*, and consider how the tradition-focused method of Chinese philosophy is well equipped to meet these challenges. The concentration in these first two sections will be on methodology. Section three ("Concepts") will

paper concerns how Anglo-analytic philosophy as a way of thinking is markedly different from Chinese philosophy—which again is outlined in extremely broad terms. Additionally, while the purpose of this paper is to reflect on how insights from Chinese philosophy might be useful, this by no means rejects the importance of the Anglo-analytic approach, which is certainly quite useful for AI. Another way to frame this might be "a certain type of Anglo-analytic approach"—which is represented by some of the thinkers discussed here, but more broadly is found in the literature on AI and related references. This article does not attempt to give a summary of that literature, but address its general orientation. There are a vast number of limitations here, and perhaps those who work in the Anglo-analytic tradition would say I am fighting a straw man, but many other readers might find this very useful. I can only acknowledge the limitations and hope that this article proves useful to at least some of the readers.

8 The major point in this paper is that AI researchers draw on Anglo-analytic philosophy in certain ways, and I seek to discuss that. I am not so much discussing Anglo-analytic philosophy as such. I do make certain generalizations about it, but those are meant to be useful for understanding how AI researchers have approached issues, not how Anglo-analytic philosophy has.

9 Though Chinese philosophy is not to be put on too high a pedestal and we should readily admit that other traditions, including the Western one, could provide good resources for reflecting on ways to make AI more humanistic. Moreover, in content and method Chinese philosophy has close relatives all over Europe and America—and they are quite different from the Anglo-analytic approach as well. This paper is not arguing that Chinese philosophy is a silver bullet for all, or even any, of our problems with AI. But important contributions can certainly be made if AI researchers worked with specialists of the Chinese tradition.

then turn to specific concepts: persons, emotions, agency, and ethics. Here we will again note general similarities between the way these concepts are thought of in Anglo-analytic philosophy[10] and AI while comparing the relatively unique ways they are thought of in Chinese philosophy. The fourth section ("Math and Meaning") will explore the contemporary discourse that argues humans should model AI "thinking" and rely even more heavily on numeric models and other mathematical structures. This will be contrasted with a philosophical appreciation of complexity and understandings of *meaning* fundamentally distinct from math—early Chinese philosophy is a good example of this approach.[11]

Methods

The neuroscientist Andrew Huberman has suggested understanding addiction as "a progressive narrowing of the things that bring you pleasure". Conversely, happiness, or, as he ventures to say, "a good life" is the "progressive expansion of the things that bring you pleasure" (Huberman 2022, 6:50). There is an interesting corollary here when we look at the general orientation of Anglo-analytic philosophical approaches (including Anglo-Chinese/comparative philosophy) in comparison with the Chinese tradition. The former often tend to seek to hone in on ever more narrow aspects of greater issues, while the latter is relatively expansive in what it takes into account. This section explores some differences between the Chinese tradition and contemporary Anglo-analytic philosophy,[12] relying heavily on general distinctions in orientations. These can be particularly useful for the current project—especially as "AI"[13] and "Chinese

10 Again, I do not mean all of Anglo-analytic philosophy, but certain trends related to it, especially those which emphasize "technological reasoning", "mechanical appreciations", "abstract consideration of things as distinct from their environments", and "algorithmic ideology".

11 Given the breadth of the topic, this paper has many limitations. Chinese philosophy, Anglo-analytic philosophy, and AI are far more complex than can be presented, and there are counter examples to every generalization made. The purpose of this paper is to inspire certain types of reflection, and by no means to provide an exhaustive account of debates and issues raised here. For those who find this description of Anglo-analytic philosophy problematic, please replace it with "some technical and mechanistic ways of approaching philosophical issues".

12 Much of what is said about Anglo-analytic philosophy applies to Anglo-Chinese/comparative philosophy as well.

13 In this paper AI is often used as a gloss for algorithms, machine learning, and deep learning—and each of these terms can be further broken down. While non-experts may find this quite acceptable, it should be noted that the difference between these terms is significant not only for programmers and technologists, as there are huge philosophical implications as well. However, this has not been (to my knowledge) discussed in detail.

philosophy”[14] are already huge generalizations, and combining them necessitates using broad strokes.

One general orientation in Western philosophy, pioneered by Socrates and Plato, is the distinction between “essence” or “substance” and its “attributes”. The thing-in-itself is what counts, and those aspects which are accidental—which can include anything from size and colour to emotions and social relationships—should be purposively neglected to whatever extent possible. Here thinking is understood as an ascent towards this “true essence”, and moulded into the shape of a pyramid—as one progresses, one moves higher, as one treads on increasingly narrow space, the expansive concrete world gets further away. For example, when thinking with Euthyphro about piety and justice, Socrates characteristically rejects concrete examples in searching for a universal definition. As their dialogue moves along, it becomes increasingly narrow and abstract. Interestingly, neither Socrates nor Euthyphro consider social roles or emotions as integral for their discussion of “ethics”.

In the *Analects* we find the opposite orientation. Confucius is well-known for refusing to provide the abstract definitions his students consistently ask for, answering instead with the very type of concrete examples Socrates rejects. When considering whether or not a son should cover for his father who has stolen a sheep, Confucius prioritizes social relationships and emotional considerations. One could imagine the Chinese sage chastising Euthyphro—not for not knowing the universal definition of piety, but for simply being a bad son. Rather than appreciating the complexity and difficulty of his situation, Euthyphro is encouraged to look at matters so abstractly that actions and concepts are all but completely isolated from their context. In the *Analects* we find phrases that celebrate the opposite: “There is nothing I must do and thinking I must not do” (*Analects*, 18.8), or “ornamental aspects are like basic dispositional aspects and basic dispositional aspects are like ornamental aspects” (*Analects*, 12.8) point to the centrality of concrete particulars in ethical reflections.

The general differences here can be summarized as follows: With Socrates we seek to exclude concrete particulars in order to grasp essences and come up with universal definitions. We narrow what counts, we abstract from environments, and evaluate without recourse to models or examples. All “ornamental aspects” are completely strained out so we are left with only “basic dispositional aspects”. Further, we must be completely responsible for our own reasoning. With Confucius,

14 We could start, of course, by simply asking whether or not there is in fact any “Chinese philosophy”. Many other disputes about labelling or categorizing Chinese thought exist and are alive and well (some more or less just born) as will be outlined below.

on the other hand, we seek to gather as many particulars as possible, we do not divorce basic dispositions (which function similar to "essence") from attributes, and reject universal definitions favouring instead examples, exemplars, and models. There is a progressive expansion of what matters, and we aim to appreciate as many environmental factors as we reasonably can. We are not completely responsible for our evaluations, we view ourselves and our own agency as part of a tradition and interrelated with everything else.

In broad terms, the development of these two traditions carried on along these respective lines. Western thought emphasized essences, the rejection of particulars, and sought universal definitions through relatively abstract and concept-based discussions. Moreover, many great Western philosophers began their work with criticisms of those who came before, and proclaimed to have a better handle on the "Truth" than their own teachers. The Chinese tradition was "tradition-focused"—philosophy developed mainly through commentaries which started with the classics and claimed to merely be reinterpreting them to resonant with current socio-political situations. Contextualizing with an emphasis on practical issues was commonplace. So too was modelling the past. Learning from, rather than overcoming, was the attitude toward predecessors. (We may note that Western thinkers often assumed they were more original than they really were, while Chinese commentators often claimed to be less original than they really were.)

Anglo-analytic philosophy can be seen as the development of Western philosophical thought with a particular "linguistic turn". Here hypothetical questions—which even to this day are all but absent in Chinese philosophy[15]—dominate. Analogously, nearly every term or concept is narrowed as much as possible. For instance, the analytic tradition does not admit "lying" as a topic; one must differentiate between at least several types of lying. Unsurprisingly, culture, tradition, differences between languages, even the fact that a person changes over time, or that they interact differently depending on their interlocutor or environment, are all challenges for this methodology. It reduces these aspects, just as it does "lying" or anything else, to linguistic math problems. In this way we hope to trade only with absolutes, with universals, and, of course, Truth with a capital T as the main targets.

Herein lies a core difficulty with the relationship between philosophy and AI. When those who seek to inject more "humanism" or humanistic values—including morality and ethics—or even to simply reflect on assumptions made by the programmers and programs themselves (as well as their implementation) turn to

15 By "Chinese philosophy" I often mean Chinese philosophy in China and Chinese, not the study of Chinese philosophy done in English.

Anglo-analytic philosophy, they often look in an only slightly unfamiliar mirror. There is a level of convenience which perpetuates this relationship and sterilizes it to some extent. Both AI and Anglo-analytic philosophy are dialects of the same language. Conceptually, they are akin as well—they tend to narrow the world through reducing cultural differences, ignoring tradition, pretending simplistic linguistic equivalences between languages, and treating people as rational agents with an agency which is static, singular, and individualistic. Thus, when trying to improve the current problems with AI, looking to Anglo-analytic philosophy can certainly be fruitful,[16] but looking beyond this approach may result in even more unexpected contributions.

"Inspiration" captures perhaps the single greatest difference between traditional Chinese philosophy (and traditional Western philosophy) and the approach of Anglo-analytic philosophy and AI research. Ignoring how we might generalize various forms of inspiration in the East and West, we can begin by noting that Chinese philosophy is often described as "practical". The discussion on narrowing versus expanding above has often taken shape as "Western philosophy is abstract and universal, Chinese philosophy is concrete and practical". Some have sought to claim that Chinese philosophy is not merely practical, as it has a lot to say about metaphysics, ontology, and the like. For example, in the hands of Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) the *Laozi* 老子 (*Book of Master Lao*) becomes a treatise on "nothingness" (*wu* 無) as an ontological source of all things, and the metaphysical basis for their functioning. Truly, Wang Bi also explores the socio-political implications. Applying his "root-branches" model Wang says the ruler should model the nothingness of *Dao* as the root, and allow the people as branches to become full—and this will be the concrete implementation of non-action (*wuwei* 無為) and self-so (*ziran* 自然). But Wang Bi's commentary offers much more as well. The "practical" aspects of what he says might also be understood as "practical" for the individual, too. Fully adopting the ideas of non-action and self-so himself, Wang completely refrains from telling the individual what they should or should not do in a precise and mechanistic manner. Rather, Wang's work is practical for readers in the sense of inspiring philosophical reflection—in a word, Wang Bi *inspires*.

Contemporary academia has been moving toward greater measurability and quantification in nearly all areas. Academic journals today often ask reviewers to evaluate papers based on tables with Likert-style rankings from 1 to 5. The exact questions they ask are a "feedback loop" or mirror of the very measurability and qualification this structure promotes, with questions such as "How likely is this

16 I am by no means suggesting that analytic philosophy has not nor cannot make significant contributions to AI. For example, Paul Grice's work on the extended meaning of utterances has been appreciated by computer scientists with great effect (see Russell 2019).

paper to be cited by other researchers?" No academic journal I know of asks about inspiration (as if this could be measured)—though the texts we work on are all incredibly inspiring, and thus, one assumes, that is why we work on them in the first place. And their lack of providing mathematical solutions is what sparks debate along with inspiration. Reviewers are also not asked about whether the article resonances with or even is aware of traditional scholarship. Even in Chinese philosophy journals demonstration of competence in language, classic commentaries, and cultural sensitivity is not assessed.[17] We may also say—though again there are plenty of exceptions—that Anglo-analytic philosophy (and AI research in some ways) does not prioritize inspiration, either. Academics are famously bad at communicating with non-academics, but it is no stretch to suggest that Anglo-analytic philosophers have a particularly difficult time in inspiring the public, or even in convincing others about the meaning (in either sense of the word) of their work.

While sound arguments with logical reasoning and a sharp eye for the Truth provide a standard in Anglo-analytic philosophy, one of the key markers for "good" philosophical research in Chinese thought is the rather obtuse notion of *tong* 通, which literally means "without obstruction", "open", "unimpeded" or "through". It is used, for example, when making sure a road is not a deadend: "Is this road *tong*? (這路通不通？)" In philosophical arenas it means something like "resonance" or "thoroughness". A philosophy student is extremely happy to hear from an advisor "your work is *tong*", as this means that the work resonates well with whatever text they are working on, and that it fits well with certain streams of traditional scholarship. We might conceptualize it like this: Whatever idea is *tong* runs through a text and parts of the tradition. It communicates well and is not in direct conflict with other important aspects of that text or the tradition. Accordingly, the "argument" and "reasoning" utilized to achieve *tong* relies on the very philosophical approach already found in the *Analects*, gathering as many particulars (other parts of the text and tradition) as possible, and heavily referencing models and examples—often in the form of extensive quotations in what might be called "appeals to authority", but are better understood as "humbly learning from masters".

Chinese philosophy can thereby be understood as a "tradition-focused" philosophy. There are two related connotations of "tradition-focused". First, it means learning from and referring tradition—much of what *tong* is all about. Second, it means not taking persons, concepts, or thinking out of their traditional context. Importantly, this is not limited to dealing with the past. Today tradition also

17 The most extreme version of this is evidenced by those who proclaim that Western academia is "racist", and yet only cite other Western academics in their work. (Moreover, it is quite obvious that there is far more overt racism and sexism in Chinese universities, which these scholars similarly idealize as more diverse and pluralistic than, for instance, North American ones.)

needs to be prioritized in the way we think about other people we encounter, about ideas people have, the way they think, and much else. As we will explore in the following sections, a tradition-focused philosophy cares deeply about culture and language, it does not view things in isolation, it emphasizes the importance of relationships and environments, and takes inspiration and meaning as final evaluative standards.

Technology and Tradition

In his work on algorithms and digital dilemmas Roberto Simanowski asks: Are we "on the brink of a society that views social, political, and ethical challenges as technological problems that can be fixed with the right algorithm, the best data, or the fastest computer" (Simanowski 2018, 209) or more advanced AI? In much of the world today the answer is put into practice in implicit and explicit ways every day. And it trends strongly towards the affirmative.

One such example of the explicit push for this type of thinking is found in *Algorithms to Live By: The Computer Science of Human Decisions* (2016), which says enough already in the title. The "interdisciplinary" nature of the work further drives home the point. It is co-authored by Brian Christian, who researches computer science and Anglo-analytic philosophy, and Tom Griffiths, who works on psychology, cognitive science, and machine learning. While their interests are broad, their approach is fundamentally the same. Be it computer science and Anglo-analytic philosophy or cognitive science and machine learning, the way these authors view the world relies on the same foundational assumptions about "social, political, and ethical challenges as technological problems that can be fixed with the right algorithm, the best data, or the fastest computer or more advanced AI". The two claim that the algorithms that comprise AI systems are not just for computers, they actually have a lot to teach humans about the best way to live. Already in the first chapter, titled "Optimal Stopping" the authors claim that the algorithm for the 37% rule can be used to find anything from the optimal apartment or parking place to "optimal" spouse.

The 37% rule says that if you have to make a decision about choosing something (or someone) first set a predetermined amount of time you allot for looking for that thing, then spend the first 37% of that time just looking—do not make any choices—then after that 37% of time has passed pick the first candidate you like (as compared with the first 37%). If you assume that you cannot go back and choose one of those in the first 37%, and that any choice you make after the first 37% will be successful (e.g. she will say "yes") then mathematically, this is the best

strategy. The problem with the 37% rule is not that it does not align with our values nor that it ignores the idea of romantic love—though arguments can certainly be made along these lines—rather, the problem is that is asks us to conceive of the world using a model that simply is not accurate, and further it encourages a type of thinking that has little to do with the actual world. For example, in what (meaningful) situations can you reasonably designate a predetermined amount of time to make important decisions? The authors reference marriage, but setting specific time limits is an odd and often impractical way to think about finding a spouse (not to mention the subject themselves will change over time). Additionally, there are very few situations in which one cannot go back to previous options, and there is no guarantee in that one's choice after a certain period will be accepted. (We might also think, if everyone accepted the 37% rule in dating this would completely change how people thought, acted, and made decisions about dating. Knowing that oneself or one's date was still within the confines of the first 37% would certainly have an impact, as would being aware that the 37% was already reached. It just creates another self-fulfilling prophesy.)

The idea of using the 37% rule in real life is bizarre, if not comical. More importantly, it says absolutely nothing about *how* the choice is made. What qualities should we look for in an apartment or spouse? How do we evaluate them? What should our standards be? How do we balance them with other factors? These and a whole host of other questions, which are exceedingly more important, are completely ignored by the 37% rule. Mathematics might give us some interesting notes about how to spend time, but it says nothing meaningful about our actual interactions with the world.

Interestingly, Christian and Griffiths open their "Optimal Stopping" chapter with an epigraph quoting Jane Austen: "If you prefer Mr. Martin to every other person; if you think him the most agreeable man you have ever been in company with, why should you hesitate?" They could hardly have chosen an author who is more opposed to the mechanistic and technocratic "optimal stopping" approach to love. The Jane Austen quote seems to work. But only because it is taken out of context. And this is true of the entire approach the 37% rule promotes. Without context, i.e. without the real world in all of its complexity, the 37% rule might just be the best way to think about decision making. We do, however, live in the world where one's self, interactions, and the world itself cannot simply be reduced to math problems.[18] Out of context, Jane Austen's quote can be used to promote "optimal

18 The authors do admit that we do not live in conditions that make the 37% rule as mathematically sound as it might appear to be. However, the entire book is premised on steering human thinking and decision making towards these types of algorithms which do view the world in a very narrow way. Or, as they put it, the 37% rule is still "the best possible strategy" (Christian and Griffiths 2016, 14).

stopping". However, this quote comes actually from Emma criticizing Harriot for asking her for advice in matters of her own feelings. The sentence directly preceding the one quoted in the epigraph reads: "'Not for the world,' said Emma, smiling graciously, 'would I advise you either way [i.e. to marry Mr. Martin or not]. You must be the best judge of your own happiness.'" Emma no more seeks to have the world than to chalk it up to just so many math problems and data points. The heroines of Austen's novels are not just against traditional approaches to marriage, they are markedly against calculations or "algorithmic thinking" in general.

Simanowski has serious worries about the type of ethos promoted by the technocratic and mechanistic orientation Christian and Griffiths celebrate, and comes down on this thinking much harsher than Emma or Austen. For example, apply this type of thinking to education (which many parts of the world already do) and students become focused on competence and test scores rather than learning. They excel at taking tests but are hardly reflective. Or as Martha Nussbaum criticizes, "nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements" (Nussbaum 2010, 2). Christian embodies exactly these fears of Simanowski and Nussbaum, when he says, "There is a very deep resonance indeed between some of these ideas in computer science [regarding the best algorithms for machine learning] and the same fundamental algorithms of learning that evolution found" (Christian 2022, 22:40). In other words, humans and computers use the same methods for learning—and this rings true when we think of human education in terms of "objective functions" and other standards of computer science. Or what Nussbaum calls "useful machines" and Simanowski describes as reducing learning to obeying traffic rules. Changing our perspective to appreciate inspiration, meaning, and tradition we are forced to think quite differently about mapping algorithms onto human thinking. Indeed, there are many cases where this simply will not meet our real-world demands. In *The Age of AI* (2021), Henry Kissinger, Eric Schmidt, and Daniel Huttenlocher concentrate exactly on those types of issues—which they argue are the most pressing.

According to Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher nothing less than a "new guiding philosophy" (Kissinger et al. 2021, 224) is required for our age of AI. They sharply disagree with the explicit widespread agreement in AI research that "everything can be figured out". Accordingly, as technology advances at unprecedented rates, at nearly unimaginable scales, and with unpredictable results, our solutions to the problems that arise is not ever more progress—we need deliberate philosophical reflection. They compare our current state to the Enlightenment, where "new technology engendered new philosophical insights, which, in turn,

were spread by the technology" (ibid.). Again, this is not a problem to be solved by mathematicians, or those whose thinking is characterized by ahistorical, linguistically uniform, and narrowing tendencies. Translation provides a provocative example. As relations between nations is increasingly mediated through AI translation, the potential for error, and for false-confidence—for example in an erroneous AI translation of sensitive information—intensifies. As Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher note: "AI translators will facilitate speech, uninsulated by the tempering effect of the cultural familiarity that comes with linguistic study" (ibid., 222). Our philosophy of AI needs to be highly sensitive to the types of analysis, thinking, and imagining about the world that mathematical models are blind to. The cultural implications of AI, the role of humans in their collaborative future with AI, and the types of values, norms, and ethics we want to express in and through AI require sensitivity to the particularness of the human condition, and its "spontaneous experience of reality, in all its contradiction and complexity" (ibid., 219).

The "tradition-focused" aspects of Chinese philosophy are well suited to meet the challenges Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher raise. Admittedly, we may very well need something new, a philosophical revolution akin to the Enlightenment, but it needs to be one that is critically sensitive to culture, language, and tradition, and does not see humans, their interactions, or the world as reducible to just so many mathematical algorithms. If the world really is spontaneous, complex, and full of contradictions, then Anglo-American philosophy is an ill-suited tool, and AI researchers need to expand their resources for humanistic reflection. As will be further demonstrated in the following section, Chinese thought accepts and works directly with spontaneity, complexity, and contradiction. Drawing on Chinese philosophy as a uniquely suitable resource to move forward into our collaborative future with AI is therefore a viable option, and one that should be taken seriously for other reasons as well.

In addition to offering a useful methodology to tackle the problems we face looking at our age of AI and the suitability of its major concepts (which will be discussed below), there are political reasons to take Chinese thought seriously. Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher do not tire of pointing out that the US *and* China are the front runners in the age of AI. As we come to terms with this, we are certainly going to need to understand Chinese thought better. The Chinese tradition needs to be taken seriously for, if not moral, ethical, or cultural considerations, at least for diplomatic reasons. This will not mean, as some have suggested, simply plugging in codes for "filial piety" and "using chopsticks" next to "justice" and "forks". The entire way we approach AI will need to be constructively reworked. Specifically, the views on persons, emotions, agency, and ethics

as well as understandings of meaning, are in a dialectical relationship with the tradition-focused methodology, and understood in ways markedly different from the conceptions held by many AI researchers and Anglo-analytic thinkers.[19]

Concepts

The affirmation of ceaseless change marks an underlying assumption in Chinese thought. Conversely, Anglo-analytic philosophy seeks to overcome change to whatever extent possible. Analysis in the latter approach prefers discrete, abstract, and isolated subjects. When change is admitted, it is given as simplistic a rendering as possible. Chinese thought ventures to the other extreme. Here change is not only affirmed, but its presence can be taken as a point of emphasis. With its tendency to bring more and more variables into reflective consideration, "change" is often discussed as "transformation"—and through this concept we can get a better grasp of the general approaches to people, emotions, agency, ethics, meaning, and contingency in Chinese thought.

While we may speak of transformations as "occurring", it is more accurate to understand everything as constantly transforming. We normally only notice larger changes (hence we say "change occurs"), but we all know that smaller changes are happening all the time. To borrow from Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312) we can say that everything is some grouping of natural dispositions (*xing* 性). These dispositions might have certain innate tendencies, but whether or not they move in those directions—and whatever directions they do end up moving in—is all a result of their transforming with all other natural dispositions. All natural tendencies are ceaselessly transforming in their interactions with all others. These interactions are not "secondary", they do not happen, for example, when you go to the store but not when you stay home. Everything is always interacting with everything else in its environment—regardless of whether that environment is the most sterile room on earth or the deep Amazonian rain forest.

Of course tracing every interaction is impossible. Not only are there simply too many, but they are simply too complex as well. The web of everything transforming as it interacts with everything else means that when one attempts to isolate some interactions they are only viewing one small dimension of what is really going on. (Modern biologists and physicists also admit this point—and some even chastise analytic philosophy for borrowing from modern science in nearly

19 Specific discussions of theoretical differences between Chinese and Western approaches to AI are still being developed, for some insights in more practical application and regulation see (Roberts et al. 2021).

all regards except this one.)[20] One informative way to think about the differences between Chinese philosophers is in terms of where they demarcate the lines of what should or should not be included in their reflections.

Conceptions of the person which appreciate constant transforming with the environment view social interactions and relationality as key components—we may even say that there is no meaningful way to describe a person outside of social roles and relationships. We know well that our bodies are constantly interacting and changing with the environment, and it is no large imaginative leap to realize this in terms of personal identity and meaning. Whether it is language, likes, and hobbies, or religious, political, and philosophical convictions, everything that meaningfully gives people a sense of self, and a sense of others, comes from their environment—and specifically, what they learn from others and how these interactions play out. In early Chinese philosophy people are not thought of as abstract individuals whose social relations are accidental. Indeed, it is precisely the contrary, outside of social relations and interactions with their environment there is no meaningful way to speak of anyone.

Summarizing the way programmers and much of society view people, Shoshana Zuboff describes a type of "individualism" which "shifts all responsibility for success or failure to a mythical, atomized, isolated individual, doomed to a life of perpetual competition and disconnected from relationships, community, and society" (Zuboff 2018, 33). People are thought of as rational agents who are not constituted by their environment and relations, but rather can stand apart from them and deliberate about exactly which parts will be, and how they will be, incorporated into themselves. This break down of people, interactions, and environments into discrete components that can be tinkered with mechanically, is echoed in views of agency as well. Someone might have the desire to do X, but they can rationally reflect—outside, somehow, the influence of that desire—and decide to do Y if they so please. Like relationships, community, and society, a person's emotions, feelings, and desires can be incorporated into decision making, and the way a person understands themselves and others. But neither the "external" relationships, community, and society nor the "internal" emotions, feelings, and desires meaningfully comprise who a person is in an inalienable manner. (Henry Rosemont would apply this specifically to analytic philosophers, too.)

The early Chinese view on emotions could hardly be more different. The very word for "emotion" is *qing* 情, which, tellingly, no more connotes an individual's emotion than the environment. In other words, there is a thorough recognition that one's emotions are intimately tied to the environment, and that environments

20 This will be discussed in more detail below.

elicit certain emotions.[21] Similarly, there is no hard and fast distinction between emotions and reason. Again, terminology helps demonstrate the point: *xin* 心 refers to both the house of thinking and feeling, and is thereby nearly universally understood as some variant of "heart-mind". Truly, it would be incredibly difficult to find terms that would even allow for a distinction between heart and mind, or "reasoning about something" as opposed to "feeling about something" in early Chinese thought.[22]

A brief glimpse into the specifics demonstrates this point: One of the major goals of early Confucianism is to provide guidance for people to become moral or ethical members of society. The strategies for cultivating moral persons do include rational arguments that aim to convince people. But more often, and more importantly, we find a host of discussions aimed at emotionally inspiring people to do what is moral or "humane" (*ren* 仁). Why should one bury one's dead parents? Just look at unburied people (*Mencius* 3A:5). Or, to rephrase *Analects* 17.21: What if I don't want to mourn for three years after my parents die? Well, good people don't enjoy parties for a while after their parents die, you should at least try refraining from them and see if this doesn't help you have more appropriate thoughts and feelings. And that's it, no further "argument" is needed. In this way people are sometimes cultivated with emotion and sometimes with reason leading the way. Regardless, there is an expectation that when one leads, the other will eventually follow.[23]

Thinking in this way entails a very particular view of agency. The person does not direct their actions from a purely rational capacity that sits somehow outside the ultimate influence of environments, and even one's own feelings and desires. Agency is seen instead as completely tied up in emotions and environmental factors. Whatever one ultimately decides to do cannot be isolated into pure reason or some abstract and isolated decision-making process—it is always thoroughly effectuated by the whole person: their thoughts and feelings, their interactions, upbringing, tradition, language, and many other factors. In this way agency itself is subject to cultivation as well. When a person is young they are not good at critically reflecting on their own thoughts, emotions, desires, and interactions or

21 Again, this is a simple generalization. One of the best examples of an early Chinese thinker who vehemently disagrees is Ji Kang 嵇康 (d. 262), who famously argues that music does not necessarily elicit or come from particular emotions. For a discussion of this essay see Rošker (2014).

22 In modern Chinese we can say "我觉得" which means "I think/feel …" in certain contexts, there is more of an emphasis on thinking or feeling. And while we can separate the two, the phrase indicates a mixture where thinking and feeling should not be cleanly delineated.

23 On contemporary reiteration of this point has been popularized by Johnathan Haidt. See, for example, his work on "moral emotions" (Haidt 2003).

surroundings. In contrast, if a person cultivates themselves well then their ability to critically reflect becomes greatly enhanced.

In Confucian thought the best ways to develop one's agency is to make sure one has good influences.[24] Studying poetry, history, and other classic texts is a good way to learn from exemplars, so too is surrounding oneself with good people—particularly one's friends and teachers. But there is also a strong concern for one's neighbourhood, as it is recognized that this will be quite influential as well. Likewise, bad people are to be avoided.[25] And people are told to do good things even if they do not completely think or feel them. The practice of ritual is a practice of cultivating one's thoughts, feelings, and agency through prescribed bodily behaviours. For example, one should mourn for three years after one's parents die. Even if one wants to party, or especially if one wants to party, one should refrain from doing so in order to become a better person, i.e. a person with good thoughts, feelings, and agency. A modern-day example is making children say "thank you". Even if they do not feel appreciation, and in fact especially if this is the case, parents will force them to say "thank you". The hope is that the children will eventually develop a sense of gratitude. (We can apply this to "sorry", as well.)

In opposition to the Chinese conception of an agency that grows, many Anglo-analytic philosophers and AI researchers take agency as a ready-made power. Moreover, this power is critically divorced from external (non-rational) influence. Even Zuboff, who comes down so harshly on the "mythical, atomized, isolated individual, doomed to a life of perpetual competition and disconnected from relationships, community, and society" that dominates AI research, still speaks of the "sovereignty of the individual" (Zuboff 2018, 6) and holds "self-determination" (ibid., 18) as an ideal. Her work on surveillance capitalism is largely organized around demonstrating that AI is able to "nudge, tune, herd, manipulate, and modify behaviour in specific directions by executing [even subtle] actions" (ibid., 200). We must resist the malicious AI utilized in surveillance capitalism because it tampers with the sovereignty of our autonomous power. In other words, even while working against perspectives of the individual as atomized and isolated, Zuboff views the person in much the same way, and is especially focused on a

24 This is not a vicious circle, one has some inclinations toward what is good, and one needs to develop them. More importantly, however, Chinese thought does not worry about abstract logical arguments when it comes to recognizing basic differences between good and bad. See for example Robber Zhi sections in the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 and the famous line "robbers also have a way (盗亦有道)." (*Zhuangzi* 10.1)

25 Confucius said, "Thinking of what is good [and pursuing it] as if it could not be reached; thinking of what is not good [and avoiding it] as if it is boiling water (孔子曰：「見善如不及，見不善如探湯。)." (*Analects* 16.11).

type of agency that is all but entirely isolated from environmental factors. A more expansive analysis would recognize that our agency is always being influenced by other factors, and especially our emotions, which must always be tied to our environment. Rather than criticizing AI for "herding" or "manipulating" people, we should note that it influences them in ways or with methods that we do not approve of.[26] The influence itself is inescapable—decision-making is necessarily influenced by environmental factors.

As the biologist/neurologist Robert Sapolsky notes, when trying to understand agency we must recognize the influence of many factors, including, for example "the sensory environment you were in the previous minute, the hormone levels in your bloodstream that morning, whether you had a wonderful or stressful last three months and what sort of neuroplasticity happened, what hormone levels you were exposed to as a fetus, what culture your ancestors came up with and thus how you were parented when you were a kid" (Sapolsky 2021, 48:45). We can at least start with these elements, though there are many more. Sapolsky strongly criticizes Anglo-analytic philosophers for proudly taking basically all other insights from biology and neuroscience into account, while ignoring the science on agency. The Chinese philosophical approach, in contrast, allows us to appreciate precisely these factors and expound on their moral significance.[27]

Since the Enlightenment morality and ethics in Western thought has largely been dominated by two approaches: those influenced by deontological thinking, and those that concentrate on various types of utilitarian calculations. Both are fundamentally grounded in a hyper-atomistic and rationally charged view of the individual and the world—along the lines described by Zuboff above. Much of contemporary moral and ethical discourse is a continuation of these themes, and has come to be dominated by perspectives on the person, emotions, and agency as outlined earlier.[28] That are persons meaningfully composed of and with their relations, that emotions are important, the environment influential, and agency is not an abstract rational power, are all hugely downplayed in the moral and ethical discussions of Anglo-analytic philosophers. As will be demonstrated in the

26 Byung-Chul Han elaborates this in ways that allow us to appreciate Zuboff's point in a broader context. Han writes: "Big data and artificial intelligence enable the information regime to influence our behavior at a level that lies below the threshold of consciousness. The information regime takes hold of those pre-reflexive, instinctual, emotive layers of behaviour that precede conscious action" (Han 2022, 10).

27 There are many Western philosophers who also conceive of the person and agency along similar lines, with Nietzsche as one such example.

28 For example, Nick Bostrom, a key figure in AI theory and AI ethics, is an extreme consequentialist (see Bostrom 2014).

following section, AI researchers have taken their cues from these philosophers, and developed algorithms accordingly. Perhaps most damningly, the attitudes taken towards AI are equally based on assumptions about humans and the world as nothing more than highly complex mechanical processes[29] that can, and will, be meaningfully expressed and steered by powerful computers with highly "intelligent" machine-learning algorithms.

Moral and ethical views coming out of early Chinese thought reject this orientation in thinking about human interactions. Confucianism tells people to start with living up to their roles and cultivate themselves therein. Beginning with immediate family roles, the person is supposed to gradually learn how to act appropriately in various social contexts. Doing so always means thinking about context, environments, relationships, roles, others, and of course ritual and tradition. Reason is not given priority over emotions, nor are the two meaningfully separated. While there are specific virtues to be cultivated, they are best thought of as achieved within interpersonal relationships. No one can be "filial" without parents—and how this plays out is ultimately dependent on the particular individuals involved. It is the parents and child who together in their relationship accomplish instances of filial piety. The "cultivation" a person experiences is of their reason, emotions, and agency as tending towards filial interactions. However, this requires constant vigilance. No one ever "became filial"—they can only be said to excel at manifesting good relations (or "filial" ones) with others. And since transformation is constant, and all aspects of the environment have influence, complexity is constant and unresolvable. Confucian ethics is best classified as ways of reflecting on interpersonal relationships. Unlike deontological thinking, utilitarian calculations, and the mechanistic treatments of Anglo-analytic philosophy, early Chinese thought neither offers, supposes, or even desires final *solutions*.[30] In this way it is quite unfit for discussion in contemporary academia. Some of the most famous phrases regarding ethics, morality and the complexity they entail include: "Humans broaden the way, the way does not broaden humans" (*Analects* 15.29), "that was one time and this is another" (*Mencius* 2B:22), and "there is nothing I must do and nothing I must not do" (*Analects*

29 AI theorists and ethicists often translate human abilities into computer terms. For example: "Biological neurons operate at a peak speed of about 200 Hz, a full seven orders of magnitude slower than a modern microprocessor (~ 2 GHz)" (Bostrom 2014, 53).

30 Commenting on an early draft of this paper Dimitra Amarantidou writes: "It's not that we don't want solutions in Confucianism. But we don't want one solution or one set of reiteratable solutions. It's not a single-solution theory, right? We want a proliferation of context-dependent solutions. And this is why it is unfit for current discussions. Scientific thinking can only progress on a single-solution basis. Because it can only focus on one, as narrow as possible, problem at a time. Kongzi [Confucius] is dealing with many questions at a time when he talks with people. And he expects them to think in this multi-polar way, too."

18.8). In the realm of contemporary academia, but especially from the perspective of Anglo-analytic philosophy, these are incredibly unsatisfying statements. However, they are not supposed to convince through argumentation—or, their "argument" can only become manifest in considering these ideas when living and experiencing their validity. That is how Chinese philosophy has always operated, and it makes it uniquely applicable to dealing with the "spontaneous experience of reality, in all its contradiction and complexity".

Math and Meaning

"The idea that society can be made more consistent, more accurate, and more fair by replacing idiosyncratic human judgment with numerical models is hardly a new one"—so opens Brian Christian's chapter on "fairness" in his book *The Alignment Problem* (2020). The "alignment problem" is a widely discussed issue in AI research. It refers to the problems involved in building AI systems that function in ways which are aligned with the expectations of their developers or users. Often this is discussed in terms of values, what Stuart Russell calls the "value alignment problem": the problem of trying to align AI values with human values. Many AI researchers turn to formalized metrics, statistical specifications, and other numerical models to achieve this, as Christian suggests. In a generalized sense, this is exactly the language of Anglo-analytic philosophy, and we might gloss it as a mathematical approach as well.

To a limited extent improving mathematical models can improve society, but mainly in areas where math is foundational. For example, the terrible bias in facial recognition technology turned out to be a problem of data. The data sets used to train this technology were largely comprised of white male faces, making predictions of female and especially non-white female faces extremely poor.[31] Here making AI align better with human values, or more "humanistic", can be seen as a math problem. Better data sets will mean more accurate predictions. However, the humanistic consequences of predicting that a human face is actually the face of a "gorilla" is not easily translated into 0's and 1's. While some, including Christian, have suggested that we can use math to make AI "understand" the qualitative difference between misidentifying a cat as a dog and a human as a gorilla. The problem is far from mathematical. Environments, interactions, and contexts all play a role in complex and unpredictable ways. Formalization restricts or even kills values. We need to be extremely careful when values and math intersect, be it in AI or in humans.

31 Research related to "WEIRD" or "Western educated industrialized rich and democratic" has shown that many scientific studies are skewed towards a narrow group of people.

In his book *Parentonomics* (2010), Joshua Gans refers to his role as a father as "one big economic management problem", and is quite serious about using incentives and rewards to raise his children. Food, he says, worked as a great incentive for his daughter, and so he used it in various ways to reward her for desired behaviour. For instance, he rewarded his daughter with a piece of candy every time she helped her younger brother go to the bathroom. An incentive to help with the potty training process. The daughter reacted, quite unsurprisingly given the environment, with the same mechanistic thinking her father applied, and promptly began to force her brother to drink as much water as possible. More trips to the bathroom equalled more candy. The same type of exploitation of unintended loopholes famously happens in AI research all the time. There are countless examples. One is of Astro Teller and David Andre's soccer program. In an effort to make better AI players Teller and Andre programmed a reward—far smaller than that for scoring—for taking possession of the ball. "To their astonishment, they found their program 'vibrating' next to the ball, racking up these points, and doing little else" (Christian 2020, 167). It could easily "add up" more value with possession than it could score.

Commenting on how we might reflect on the "incentive failures" in the bathroom and soccer examples given above, Brian Christian finds hope in recent AI developments: "Cognitive sciences and economists are turning to computer sciences to develop incentive structures that do not distort behavior" (Christian 2022, 25:10). For example, to correct the older sister from forcing her younger brother to drink cups of water, Christian suggests she be scolded "in precisely equal measure … [for instance taking a candy away when she forces her brother to drink water] so that the net gain of further repetitions is zero" (Christian 2020, 170). This works with AI, but that does not mean it should be applied to humans—even if some desired results do occur.

Before dealing with the development of appropriate corrections we need to recognize that that which allows us to immediately realize the "incentive failures" is not computer science at all. That they are instead examples of incentive structures gone wrong is immediately evident to everyone. No math is needed to achieve this—in fact, no math can bring about this conclusion at all. It is exactly idiosyncratic human judgment that allows us to agree. No one has to explain or prove why and how forcing a small boy to drink water does not constitute "being a good sister" or robots vibrating soccer balls is not "gaining possession of the ball", and far less "playing soccer". And no one really could, at least not in a way that would elicit universal agreement.

If we did try to translate what we immediately recognize as a blunder on the part of the big sister or the robots into the mechanistic language we would quickly find ourselves in a difficult position. Asking the big sister to replace one mechanistic model (helping her brother go to the bathroom equals candy) with another model comprehensive enough to ensure no more loopholes would be extremely time consuming, if even possible. How could one realistically account for every foreseeable situation, and get a young girl to understand? In fact, it is no more possible than it would be meaningful or practical.[32] The world is complex, and straightforward mechanistic rules only help us in the direst situations, or with issues like traffic or tax laws. In other areas excessive formalization often fails miserably.

There is a critical difference between asking children to say "thank you" or "sorry" in the Chinese realm (or the realm of most human parents) and providing "incentive structures" or "parentonomics". In actual practice the two may overlap, but how they approach the problem and how they seek to deal with it are critically different. If humans are atomistic, reason-based, with an isolated power of autonomy, and ethics can be broken down into codes, then how we treat people, what we expect from them, and how we view their development follows certain lines. Based on these assumptions it makes sense to look to computer science and the most efficacious algorithms in AI for guidance. We might try, as Christian suggests, to "zero out incentives". In doing so, however, we need to recognize that we not only treat people like mechanistic mathematical entities (or robots) but we expect them to be so as well.

The downside is clear. When this type of thinking dominates people can and do tend to look for loopholes, they satisfy the measure in a hollow or even counterproductive fashion[33] or "follow the letter of the law and not the spirit". As Stuart Russell argues, if we try to reduce everything to mathematical codes, we should remember that for thousands of years tax law has been trying to close off every loophole, and for thousands of years people have been successfully evading taxes. Drinking too much water and vibrating soccer balls are relatively innocuous examples, but what Russell warns of is these models dominating critical social systems, and then being doubly reflected in AI. In other words, we not only develop AI along these lines, but our correctives are similarly conceived. We try to fix problems by, for example, "putting in values" or developing ever more complex

32 Something vague such as: "don't let your brother drink too much" or "don't encourage him to drink too much" could be tried. But both can obviously fail in certain situations, and "too much" is something exceedingly difficult to define with any precision. Perhaps we should seek to program her with a different algorithm such as "help your brother when he needs help". Any parent knows, however, that children can often help one another doing things they are not supposed to.

33 "Goodhart's law" and "the Cobra Effect".

models, we do not address the core issues (Russell 2019, 177–79). Humans finding loopholes can be bad enough, from forcing younger brothers to drink too much water, to tax evasion and war. Depending on what we allow AI to influence or control, the loopholes it may find could lead to financial markets crashing, corrupting elections (again), and nuclear disasters.

When the *Analects* states "ornamental aspects are like essential aspects and essential aspects are like ornamental aspects" (*Analects* 12.8) the "proof" of this argument is given in an example—one which draws not on reason or logic, but on experience and emotion-infused thinking. Again, it is all about the concrete and all about drawing on a broad range of particulars. The example given to "argue" the point is: "The hide of a tiger, when stripped of its hair, is like the hide of a dog or goat stripped of its hair". The ornamental aspect is the pattern made by fur. The "essential aspect" is the actual hide, the part that keeps one warm. In nearly all situations the hide of a tiger would be seen quite differently than that of a dog or goat. The former is likely far more expensive and could connote prestige, wealth, and the like. The only time we would think of them as the same, that is, the only time we would not consider their social evaluation and the meaning of their ornamentation, is in the direst of situations. In some remote area, lost or cut off from society.

From this perspective teaching a child to say "thank you" or "sorry" is not about "incentives". The goal is *not* to develop a comprehensive and robust enough structure of rewards and punishments in the hope of guaranteeing that the child's "idiosyncratic human judgment" can be replaced by a "more consistent, more accurate, and more fair" numerical model, nor does "zeroing out" incentives come into play. Agreeing with Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher, Chinese philosophy sees the humans and the world as spontaneous, and full of contradiction and complexity. We teach a child to say "thank you" or "sorry" in hopes of developing their persons—orienting the growth of their emotions, reason, and agency. We try to help them figure out what environmental markers are most important, and give them models for reflection when they encounter new situations in the future. Truly, every situation is unique to some extent, so we need to think in ways that allow us to be continually critically reflective. The cultivation of a person is about expanding. Mathematical models are necessarily narrow, and this is a far more precarious strategy for everything from parenting children to programming AI.

Indeed, when Christian suggests that numerical models can aid in social consistency, accuracy, and fairness, he is not wrong. Cathy O'Neill also believes that math can be used to improve society along these lines. Again, it is not mathematical

models themselves that are the issue. The issue is how they are used, and whether we reflect with them to make the world smaller and narrower, or to broaden our perspective and take particulars into account. In other words, better mechanics, better math, and more powerful machines can iron out some problems, but only to a limited scope, and to a limited degree.

The *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (*Book of Master Zhuang*) relates the story of "chaos"—which we can understand as an appreciation of the spontaneity, contradiction, and complexity of the world. Chaos was a "nice" (*shan* 善) host to the rulers of the northern and southern oceans who would often meet in Chaos' realm. One day the rulers decided that Chaos was being "virtuous" (*de* 德), and according to their formalized and mechanistic thinking of virtue, they were supposed to "repay" (*bao* 報) Chaos' "virtue". "Since every person has seven orifices and Chaos has none, we should give him some" they reasoned. After drilling the seventh hole, Chaos died (*Zhuangzi* 7.7).

This story lends itself to a wide variety of interpretations. But one of the most basic messages we can glean from it is that we destroy spontaneous "niceness" by putting it into formalized and mechanistic systems. Confucianism too, even while promoting rituals, guards against overly formalistic and mechanistic tendencies. For example, the *Mencius* says ideally one should act *from* humaneness and duty, one should not act *according to* humaneness and duty (*Mencius* 4B: 47). In other words, one is not supposed to behave mechanically according to formalistic rules, rather one should actually develop themselves into a good person. This is exactly what we are teaching children when we force them to say "thank you" or "sorry". We are trying to teach them to go beyond the type of thinking that leads children to force brothers to drink (or robots vibrate next to soccer balls). We want children to appreciate the *meaning* of "thank you" and "sorry", and they do not do so by learning math problems.

Conclusion

Describing his book *Ethical Machines* (2022), which claims to be a "Guide to Totally Unbiased, Transparent and Respectful Machines", Reid Blackman writes: "don't worry—the book's purpose is to get work done, not to ponder deep and existential questions about ethics and technology. [My] clear and accessible writing helps make a complex and often misunderstood concept like ethics easy to grasp" (Blackman 2022, 225). Indeed, this is the dominant approach. Michael Kearns and Aaron Roth, authors of *The Ethical Algorithm: The Science of Socially Aware Algorithm Design* (2019a), also take issue with philosophical discussions of

terms such as "privacy", "fairness", and "morality". They argue that we must explain words like "privacy" "not in the way a lawyer or philosopher might describe them, but in so precise a manner that they can be 'explained' to a machine" (Kearns and Roth 2019a, 18).

"Privacy" is key for Kearns and Roth because they think algorithms can already be programmed in a way that ensures privacy—and they can mathematically prove it. Not just any privacy, however, what they discuss is "differential privacy" which is clear enough to be "explained to machines". They define such privacy as "a mathematical formalization of the [idea] that we should be comparing what someone might learn from an analysis if any particular person's data was included in the dataset with what someone might learn if it was not" (Kearns and Roth 2019a, 36).[34]

They further explain:

> The definition of differential privacy is, it's a property of an algorithm, first of all, not about a particular data set. An algorithm is or is not differentially private. And differential privacy is generally achieved by adding noise to computations. […] You add noise that obscures the contribution of any particular data in the analysis while preserving on statistics. (Kearns and Roth 2019b, 18:15)

Because it works in practice Kearns thinks this is a "great definition"[35] despite even its broad generalizations—for example, he says "the definition of harm can be anything you want it to be" (Kearns and Roth 2019b, 8:30). Of course anyone who "ponders deep and existential questions", any lawyer or philosopher, would have a field day with Kearns' "harm". Nevertheless, he is not entirely wrong.

In a very real sense Kearns and Roth, along with Blackman and Christian are all correct. While from a humanistic perspective we might want ethics to be about meaning and linked to human experiences of the world, there is not really any way we can translate this into code. Even if loopholes were not the issue, the very meaning of *meaning* we have outlined above is precisely opposed to numerical

34 Wikipedia defines differential privacy as "a system for publicly sharing information about a dataset by describing the patterns of groups within the dataset while withholding information about individuals in the dataset. The idea behind differential privacy is that if the effect of making an arbitrary single substitution in the database is small enough, the query result cannot be used to infer much about any single individual, and therefore provides privacy," (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Differential_privacy (accessed November 21, 2022)).

35 Kearn also states: "Sometimes the very exercise of having to think so precisely about the definitions of these social norms is itself greatly beneficial. It will not only reveal trade-offs that you were not aware of but it will also reveal flaws in your intuitions about these ideas if you just talk about them at the level of moral philosophers" (Kearns and Roth 2019b, 8:00).

models. Or, put another way, humanistic meaning itself is not translatable into algorithms. Kearns and Roth and Christian also appreciate the limits of their approach. Christian notes that models of the world are always imperfect—even if he assumes more accurate ones could be made with the right math, data, and computing power. Kearns and Roth also note that "the science can only take you so far".[36] But again, they all do take science to be an extremely important guide for human thinking and practice. In other words, they all recognize a certain paradox: AI challenges us with new questions of meaning and of human experience, but in exactly ways whereby AI itself can never be expected to make meaningful predictions. We thus find ourselves in a place where AI helps us make sense of the world, while at the same time making it more opaque and clouding our understanding.

Fortunately, some of the shifts in methodology and changes to static and atomistic assumptions about concepts such as people, emotions, agency, and ethics, and even our understandings of meaning and value, can be reflected in the way we program AI. It would require significant adjustments not only in the math involved, but *how* that math is used. This is possible, and some computer scientists are already building models which incorporate these perspectives.

Stuart Russell has been working on "inverse reinforcement learning" for over two decades. His most recent book contains a particular humanistic orientation, found already in the title *Human Compatible* (2019). Here he describes shifting AI programming from being centred on actions to states. This can be one way to understand the different thinking behind the examples of forcing brothers to drink water and children to say "thank you". The older sister thought in pure action-based mechanics, while saying "thank you" hopes to foster a certain state—both in the immediate environment and the individual. Russell describes three principles which are "intended primarily as a guide to AI researchers and developers in thinking about how to create beneficial AI systems; they are *not* intended as explicit laws for the AI system to follow" (Russell 2019, 172). (Here he already calls for moving away from mechanistic and formalized thinking, and is thus far closer to Chinese thought than to certain orientations built off Anglo-analytic philosophy.) The principles of Russell's

36 "The science can only take you so far. It can elucidate where trade-offs are [when balancing, for example, accuracy and bias in AI] but it cannot tell you where on the trade-off curve you want to live—as a society and in particular applications. And there are not going to be universal answers. We will want to prioritize fairness or privacy more in certain applications, we will want to prioritize accuracy in other applications. But there is no avoiding that we have to make hard decisions. What the science can do is help us make those decisions with our eyes open." (Kearns and Roth 2019b, 30:50)

beneficial AI systems are:

1. The machine's only objective is to maximize the realization of human preferences.
2. The machine is initially uncertain about what those preferences are;
3. The ultimate source of information about human preferences is human behavior. (Russell 2019, 173)

Russell then goes on to note that preferences will be different for different groups, for different individuals, in different situations, and change over time. Many complex issues, such as whose preferences should count, how we should weigh preferences on a social level, or there being some preferences that should not count, and other deep and existential questions, will have to be discussed. And those discussions will never end. It is an approach which necessarily does not provide *solutions* to ethical issues, but a broad and encompassing *approach*, one which takes into account the "spontaneous experience of reality, in all its contradiction and complexity". If Chinese philosophy has contributions to make in reflections about the use of AI, it is along the same lines as Russell's "inverse reinforcement learning".[37]

Indeed, while there are certainly good resources for injecting more humanism into AI in Western philosophy, and perhaps developing a new philosophy, as Kissinger et al. suggest, would be best suited for the unprecedented problems we face. In any case, the approach we find in Chinese philosophy is certainly a valuable resource for thinking about the humanistic problems with AI. In short, in collaborative approaches to AI research references to philosophy should expand beyond the Anglo-analytic tradition, and Chinese philosophy is a great counter to the prevailing tendencies, as outline in this paper.

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37 It is worth noting again that the contributions to AI research that Chinese philosophical approaches stand to make do not wholly replace those made by Anglo-analytic philosophy, and both should be used in conjunction with one another.

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Dissolution of the Self: Digital Technology, Privacy and Intimacy in Europe and the Sinophone Regions

*Jana S. ROŠKER**

Abstract

This article explores the connection between digital technology and privacy and intimacy in Europe and the Sinophone regions, with a particular focus on the changing role and constitution of human personhood. It argues that digital technology has fundamentally altered the ways in which individuals construct and maintain their personal boundaries, resulting in the erosion of traditional notions of the human self. Through an analysis of cultural and historical factors, the article demonstrates how this phenomenon manifests itself differently in Europe and mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan respectively, highlighting the specific challenges and opportunities that arise in each context. The article also considers the cultural differences between the European and Chinese cultures regarding privacy and intimacy, and the ways in which digital technology has amplified these differences. It argues that while digital technology has created new opportunities for connection and intimacy, it has also exposed individuals to new risks and vulnerabilities, including the loss of privacy and the erosion of selfhood.

Overall, the article aims to contribute to our understanding of the cultural and social implications of digital technology. It highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to the regulation of digital technology, one that takes into account cultural differences and the complex ways in which technology is reshaping our sense of self and our relationships with others.

Keywords: digital technology, humanism, the human self, personhood, privacy, intimacy

Razkroj sebstva: digitalna tehnologija, zasebnost in intimnost v Evropi ter sinofonih regijah

Izvleček

Članek raziskuje povezavo med digitalno tehnologijo ter zasebnostjo in intimnostjo v Evropi in sinofonih regijah, s posebnim poudarkom na spreminjajoči se vlogi in konstituciji človeške osebnosti. Trdi, da je digitalna tehnologija temeljito spremenila načine, kako

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posamezniki gradijo in ohranjajo svoje osebne meje, kar je povzročilo razgradnjo tradicionalnih pojmov človeškega sebstva. S pomočjo analize kulturnih in zgodovinskih dejavnikov članek prikazuje, kako se ta pojav manifestira drugače v Evropi ter na Kitajskem, v Hongkongu in Tajvanu, pri čemer poudarja specifične izzive in priložnosti, ki se pojavljajo v vsakem od obravnavanih kulturnih kontekstov. Članek prav tako upošteva kulturne razlike med evropsko in kitajsko kulturo glede zasebnosti in intimnosti ter načine, kako digitalna tehnologija te razlike poudarja. Avtorica trdi, da je digitalna tehnologija sicer ustvarila nove priložnosti za povezovanje in intimnost, vendar je hkrati izpostavila posameznike in posameznice novim tveganjem ter ranljivostim, vključno z možno izgubo zasebnosti in razgradnjo sebstva. Namen članka je prispevati k razumevanju kulturnih in družbenih posledic digitalne tehnologije. Poudarja potrebo po bolj tenkočutnem pristopu k regulaciji digitalne tehnologije, takšnem namreč, ki upošteva kulturne razlike ter mnogotere kompleksne načine, s katerimi tehnologija preoblikuje naše refleksije lastnega sebstva in naših odnosov s soljudmi.

Ključne besede: digitalna tehnologija, humanizem, človeško sebstvo, osebnost, zasebnost, intima

Introduction: The Agony of Enlightenment Values

The digitalization of our lives has brought about many unprecedented benefits, but it also requires us to make significant sacrifices. As digitalization continues to evolve, we may need to relinquish certain values and ideals of modernity that were born out of the European Enlightenment and have been ingrained in Western society.

Given the likely increasing role of digitalization in our lives, it's essential for us in Europe and other parts of the Western world to engage with it in a new way and explore new conceptualizations of autonomy, freedom, and democracy that are compatible with it. The relevance of this topic is particularly heightened in light of the current global crises faced by humanity. Therefore, the final section of this paper will illustrate potential dilemmas that may arise when utilizing digital technology during critical situations, including the digital measures implemented to combat the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021.

The key to ensuring that digital technologies[1] are used to safeguard human life and preserve fundamental human rights and freedoms is through the

1 In the context of the present paper, digital technology refers to the use of electronic devices, tools, and systems that are designed to manipulate and transmit information in digital form. This includes computer software, hardware, networks, and other related technologies that enable digital communication, storage, and processing of data. From a philosophical perspective, digital technology can be seen as a transformative force that shapes our understanding of the world and ourselves. It has redefined the ways in which we interact with each other, our environment, and our own consciousness.

implementation of strong, yet adaptable legislation and ethical frameworks that prioritize values such as interpersonal responsibility, solidarity, and cooperation, as well as the fundamental freedom and dignity of every individual. But in our search to appropriate methods that could allow us for a comprehensive and reasonable adaptations of such a new, humanist legislation, it's necessary to expand our perspectives beyond the narrow confines of Enlightenment conceptualizations of the human self and consider alternative forms of personhood and autonomy. By doing so, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of how digitalization affects our lives and create a new framework that integrates digitalization with the most significant human values and ideals.

In light of the foregoing, let's take a closer look at Sinophone societies. While there are significant differences in how "autocratic" and "democratic" societies in the region utilize digital technology, it's evident that the Chinese cultural and linguistic area as a whole has a distinct approach to digital objects that differs significantly from that of the West. In previous discussions, I have delved into several factors contributing to this culturally influenced divergence (refer to Rošker 2022 and 2023a). Nonetheless, this essay will focus on another specific issue linked to these differences, an issue that is closely tied to the safeguarding of personal data, which is central to our apprehensions regarding the diverse potentials of digital technologies. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is rooted in different specific traditional concepts of intimacy and privacy.

Two Types of Inhumanity

However, before delving into Chinese conceptualizations of privacy, it is useful to recall the intellectual foundations of European Enlightenment and modernization. Jean-François Lyotard, one of the pioneers of the theorization of postmodernism, saw modernity not only as a new period in history, conditioned by the explosive rise of industrialization and new technology, but also as the prevalence of a different perception of time (Lyotard 1991, 68); for him, modernization meant the way in which successive sequences of moments are arranged in such a way that, unlike earlier periods, they contain a high degree of contingency. At the same time, however, and perhaps for this very reason, the "grand narratives" or meta-narratives of the Enlightenment were reconstructed within the metaphysics of modernity, ranging from Romanesque through classical German philosophy, and then to Marxism. These narratives were in many ways reminiscent of mythic storylines. The important common feature of all these narratives is, of course, the kind of conception of time that leaves the future open in the name of emancipation as

the ultimate or highest goal of human history. But they are also all based on the conviction that the flow of history is something that can be thought. Lyotard sees one of the major differences between traditional and modern narratives in their principal attitudes towards society; while the former based their stance on rituality, the latter took a more political stance in this sense (ibid.). Nevertheless, it is important to see that the ideals for which these meta-narratives of human liberation argue, and which can supposedly be achieved at the end of this emancipatory development, remain indeterminate and empty, even though the entire historical development that led to them is supposed to be comprehensible and understandable. Of course, this also means that the highest goal or the final destination (in the sense of the German notion of *Bestimmung*, which includes the connotation of determination) can nevertheless not be fatally set or determined.

Both types of narratives, the mythical and traditional, as well as the modern meta-narratives, mark in the same way diachronic series of events which should be able to be rationally ordered and explained. While in the narratives of the first type this role is assumed by tradition, in the second type it has been assigned to political philosophy or ideologies.

Admittedly, modernity nevertheless draws its legitimacy not from the past, as traditional narrative forms do, but from the future, which, as we have seen, is open. This gives it new possibilities with which its narratives can become ever more complex. It is also clear that the project of human emancipation itself can in no way be equated with a pre-programming of the future as such. Lyotard points out here that "liberty is not security" (ibid.). The contingency that the project of modernity entails is based on an indeterminate future, and it is precisely this indeterminacy that conditions human freedom.

The digital age cannot, of course, abolish this contingency, even though it brings us hitherto undreamed-of possibilities of programming. Here it becomes all the more clear that digital objects, together with their own online infospheres into which they are placed, belong to the realm of technology, which can be used in ways that are beneficial, responsible and liberating, but also harmful to humanity. Thus, some philosophers of technology, such as Bernard Stiegler, see it as a double-edged sword, as described by Derrida in his work *Plato's Pharmacy*. Paraphrasing the core message of this work, Stiegler writes that, much like the writing that underlies Plato's and Derrida's problematization of the *pharmakon*, technology is both "remedy" and "poison" (Stiegler 2013, 10). Precisely for this reason, it is all the more important that in the current times of social transformations and transitions, we create new models of autonomous decision-making that meet the demands of the digital age.

The explosive spread of digital technologies has unimagined consequences for the Enlightenment concept of the subject, even in the epistemological sense, since such technologies represent the externalization of knowledge not only into tactile and physical objects, such as books, but also into virtual infospheres of digital objects. Certainly, post-industrial technologies, the digitization of data, and computer science bring new forms of knowledge that replace the aforementioned meta-narratives of philosophy and science in earlier periods, especially those that speak of emancipation and the freedom of people as autonomous beings (Kos 1995, 15). In this sense, its mechanisms have completely replaced the traditional notion of knowledge, which used to be something that could only be acquired through education in the sense of the German word *Bildung* or the Chinese term *xiu shen* 修身 which are both connected to the cultivation of human personhood. Although knowledge cannot be reduced to mere data, either now or in the future, even in the digital age, it is certainly more easily transferable and immediately usable with such technologies. In this sense, Lyotard paints a rather bleak picture that certainly points to the slow disappearance of the Enlightenment subject, as it no longer has a purpose in the digital era:

> The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. It can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language. The "producers" and users of knowledge must now, and will have to, possess the means of translating into these languages whatever they want to invent or learn. Research on translating machines is already well advanced. Along with the hegemony of computers comes a certain logic, and therefore a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as "knowledge" statements. (Lyotard 1984, 4)

This, of course, allows knowledge to be reduced to the function of commodities that can be traded. Digital technology enables a faster and easier market exchange of knowledge, which is no longer measured by the criteria of values, but by measures of worth. The production of knowledge itself is now directed towards its sale, with its value measured according to the degree of its direct usefulness. This way of appropriating, transmitting and valuing knowledge is, of course, a threat to human autonomy, since it depends primarily on the laws of the market rather than on the free choices of the people who produce and receive knowledge. The decay of education in the aforementioned sense of *Bildung* or *xiu shen* is also fatal to the capacities of the human mind and the human ability to make value judgments.

This has negative consequences not only for personal morality and social ethics, but also in terms of the growing possibilities for manipulation of the individual by the system or by the holders of political and economic power. This epistemological dimension is problematic everywhere, both in Sinophone and Euro-American societies. Culturally conditioned differences between models of understanding the relationship between people and digital technologies are more pronounced in other segments of human existence.

As I have shown elsewhere (Rošker 2023a), digital systems are relationally structured networks, which also allows in them an efficient centralization (and thus consolidated control) of the data on the basis of which they were created. Humans are not simply thrown into this world, but are both objects and subjects of the information and data with which they have been networked. In this digital reality, it is difficult to preserve the autonomous Self, which, in the role of the free subject, is supposed to confront the outside world as the object of its own perception and understanding. This simultaneous position of subjectivity and objectivity presents us with the problem of the need for a fundamental redefinition of one's Self as a human being. Chinese cultures do not assume a fixed line between subject and object in their perception of reality and the human being. Rather, in those traditions, the human being is seen as a being that has organically grown into reality. The dilemma of such a fusion of subject and object may therefore not exist at all in Chinese societies, or may exist in a much milder form.[2]

Starting from the cultural and philosophical transformations triggered by the digital age in Euro-American cultures that are the closest and most direct descendants of the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment and modernization, Lyotard has founded and developed the concept of the so-called inhuman. The French philosopher distinguishes between two forms of inhumanity as follows:

> What if human beings, in humanism's sense, were in the process of, constrained into, beco"proper" to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman? Which would make two sorts of inhuman. It is indispensable to keep them dissociated. The inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development (among others) must not be confused with the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage. To believe, as has happened to me, that the first can take over from the second, give it expression, is a mistake. The system rather has the consequence of causing the forgetting of what escapes it. But

2 For readers who are not familiar with the essential features of the conventional perspectives on the relationship between the subject and object, I recommend referring to two of my forthcoming publications, namely Rošker (2023a) and (2023b).

> the anguish is that of a mind haunted by a familiar and unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think—if one claims to exclude it, if one doesn't give it an outlet, one aggravates it. Discontent grows with this civilization, foreclosure along with information. (Lyotard 1991, 2)

In an interview with Anders Dunker, the Chinese philosopher of technology Yuk Hui points to the first form of Lyotard's inhumanity, which he describes as positive and which he explicitly associates with the Chinese system of social credit:

> Positive inhumanity captures us in rigid technological systems, like we see in China with the social credit system. The positive inhuman is one that is "more interior in myself than me"— for example, God for St. Augustine. We humans carry something inhuman in us, which is irreducible to the human and which maintains the highest intimacy with us. (Dunker 2020, 12)

The problem of intimacy and privacy, which represents one of the reasons for the differences in comprehension and acceptance of digitalization and its objects in the Western and in Chinese cultures respectively, is related to such "positive" types of inhumanity. This is most likely to be found in the different perceptions, feelings and understandings of concepts associated with notions of privacy and intimacy. In what ways does the human self respond within different linguistic and symbolic orders to new, hitherto unknown challenges of the information age?

In what follows, I will attempt to illuminate the development of the concepts of intimacy, privacy, and publicity from a transcultural perspective. As a starting point I will take the history of semantics in the Chinese-Sinic and in the European area. In the development of these concepts, we can locate a number of theoretical indicators that reflect the structures of modern society, but at the same time represent factors that retroactively influence the development of the society in which they emerged and the transformations of these societies (Tang 2020, 1). Here I will start with the assumption of the close and complex connection between semantic and social structures.

Intimacy, Privacy and Isolation and Their Modern Fate

Lyotard's concept of the inhuman opens up the question of whether this idea does not also involve the dissolution of human privacy, in the sense that what hitherto belonged only to the individuals and constituted the essence of their identity could be shared by them only if they wished it and only up to the point they chose.

Because of their relational and centralized character, the internalization of digital objects in the processes of knowledge acquisition also represents the internalization of the digital system as the centralized authority of a new agenda of existence. If in this way the external system actually invades our most private interiority and becomes a part of us, it also means that we no longer have a home to which we could retreat at any time and where we would not be afraid of heterogeneous invaders of our inner space. In other words, the hidden dwelling of our minds, which used to be entirely ours, has become transparent spaces along with their flip side, namely the basis of our ability to act autonomously in the outside world. They are not completely open, for we can still close them, but their walls have become glassy in the wake of the death of classical modernity.

It is therefore no coincidence that, according to Niklas Luhmann, the concepts of privacy and intimacy are also children of the Enlightenment movement, since they are said to have emerged in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards on the basis of increasingly complex social differentiations and to have developed through phases of idealization, paradoxisation and finally to the phase of problematisation. This private intimacy of the individual involves a perfect experience of the Self that is not fully expressible or transferable (Luhmann 1982, 17–18). It is precisely because of the impossibility of the existence and formation of such privacy and intimacy (which, as we have seen, is at the same time the basis of autonomous participation in society) that Luhmann sees pre-modern or traditional group-community systems in a rather negative light, for he points out that what is characteristic of social life in older, locally denser social systems are complex webs of relationships "which disables the emergence of individuals, the existence of private lives, and the escape into relations of two" (ibid., 37). All of this, of course, applies to relational systems or webs of relationships in Confucian Sinic societies. Here, we must not forget that in regions that have been under the influence of Confucianism for a prolonged period, there is a long tradition of local control emanating from the family and broader clan structures, manifested in informal and semi-formal institutions at the level of village and district communities (see Rošker 2023a, 77−84). In such "premodern"[3] communities, therefore, one cannot speak of intimacy or privacy in the modern sense of these terms.

The Western concept of intimacy derives from the Latin word *intimus*, meaning "the furthest from the outside edge" or "the innermost part" (Glare 1983, 952).

3 The term "premodern" is somewhat misleading, especially when applied to the social structures of non-European or non-Western societies, since it latently implies that "modernity", which in fact and in concrete reality derives from European social and economic structures, is a necessary phase in the temporal division of historical developments, independent of the cultural origins and cultural diversity of social structures and economic or political orders.

While this term has survived, for example, in my own (Slovenian) language and also in many other European languages,[4] in English, which is a kind of *lingua franca* of academic terminology, it is mainly used as a word expressing the closest connections between people or interpersonal relationships in which individuals share "their innermost parts" with their intimate partners. The contemporary Chinese synonym for Western terms associated with intimacy also refers exclusively to this interpersonal connotation.[5] It should also be noted that in English, unlike many other Indo-European languages, this term has lost its original meaning mentioned above, which refers to individual human inwardness.

This use of language is somewhat peculiar, since it seems to assume that people who are not in close relationship with others cannot have access to intimacy in the sense of the "innermost" that individuals themselves guard and protect from the free access of others. Such a use of language is certainly the result of the semantic evolution that led from the concept of intimacy as the deepest inner space of the individual to its present connotation, which refers to the closest relationships between different people. It is thus the state of a very close relationship between people that can bring about a mutual disclosure of the intimate sphere of the inner space of those who are in such a relationship. As we shall see a little later, the original meaning of the Latin word *intimus* has been at least partially transferred to the concept of privacy in English, while in numerous other Indo-European languages there is still a sharp division between the spheres of intimacy and privacy.[6] In contrast to this development, in Slovenian and in many other European languages the term intimacy is still preserved in the sense of the sphere of intimacy of persons, which denotes something different from the sphere of privacy and refers to what is hidden in the deepest layers of a person's inner space—and is thus closer to the original Latin meaning of the term. These are the deepest layers of thoughts and feelings, but also information that we do not want to share with others. The intimate sphere is inviolable because this realm of being human is the one most closely associated with human dignity (Philipp et al. 2017, 4). This sphere includes activities in our sexual relationships, entries in our diaries, our attitudes towards life and death, our personal inclinations and habits, and religious beliefs (Zhao 2015, 64).

4 For instance, in German, Spanish or French.

5 亲密关系

6 Let me cite, for example, a differentiation that can be observed in German not only in the social sciences but also in legal terminology: "In German there is no term, which would completely correspond to the English phrase 'the right to privacy', that was introduced in 1890 by Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis. … The phrase 'private sphere' has in theory multiple meanings. The English word 'privacy' actually refers to the intimate sphere, that is, the private sphere in the narrower sense, and sometimes also to a part of the social sphere." (Zhao 2015, 61)

In the processes of modernization, the original meaning of the Latin word *intimus* was simultaneously transferred to the word privacy in English, and to some extent in other Western languages. As Hannah Arendt writes, "We call private today a sphere of intimacy whose beginnings we may be able to trace back to late Roman [period]" (Arendt 1998, 38). The modern concept of privacy, not intimacy, is still the word in English today that stands in sharpest, most diametrical opposition to the social sphere. On the other hand, the most important function of the modern idea of privacy is that it protects the sphere of intimacy (ibid.), even though the latter is a hyponym of the former in English. This is despite the fact that intimacy is a hyponym of privacy in English. Consequently, many modern writers stress that the concepts of intimacy (referring to our closest and most personal relationships) and privacy are closely interrelated, and that without the preservation of privacy, interpersonal intimacy cannot be sustained (Gerstein 1978, 76).

In order to clarify the historical background of these semantic transformations, which undoubtedly have important political and psychological implications, let us first take a brief look at the evolution of the terms denoting the private, intimate, and social spheres in European culture as presented by Hannah Arendt. She emphasizes that the private sphere in ancient Greece was limited to family communities and households, which were perceived as separate from the public sphere. However, the meaning of both spheres narrows in pre-modern times when the so-called social sphere is formed, which belongs to neither the private nor the public sphere and is the seed of nation-states (Arendt 1998, 28).

In the relationship between the private and the public (which is also the political), freedom is possible only in the latter sphere, since the private in ancient Greece served exclusively the needs of survival and all the related determinations that define man's "metabolism with nature" (ibid., 98). The public or political sphere, known as the polis, differed from the private in that it represented the community of "equals", whereas the private sphere within the family or household was based on a strictly hierarchical inequality (ibid., 32). In this framework, the term privacy (*idion*), which literally means "belonging to oneself", acquired a slightly negative connotation, as it became associated with the idea of being cut off from certain freedoms that were only possible in the public sphere:[7]

> A man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian had chosen not to establish such a realm, was not fully human. We no longer think primarily of deprivation when we use the word "privacy," and this is partly due to the

7 Hannah Arendt also points here to the etymology of the English term "privacy", which is further connected to the word "deprived".

> enormous enrichment of the private sphere through modern individualism. (ibid., 38)

Thus, it is probably no coincidence that the modern, i.e. individualized, meaning of "privacy" as the antithesis of the social rather than the public developed primarily as an idea to protect intimacy (ibid.): "The first articulate explorer and to an extent even theorist of intimacy was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who, characteristically enough, is the only great author still frequently cited by his first name alone" (ibid., 39). Rousseau came to his discovery through his rebelliousness, which was directed not primarily against the oppression of people by the state, but against society with its "unbearable perversion of the human heart, its intrusion upon an innermost region in man which until then had needed no special protection" (ibid.). For him, intimacy and sociality were two distinct subjective forms of human existence. This form of intimacy discovered by the Romantics was directed against the social sphere, or rather against what it necessarily leads to with its pressure on the individual and its demands for compliance with standards and norms, namely conformism (ibid.). In this context, the intimacy of the individual gradually became part of the modernized public sphere and the close relationships within it:

> Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. (ibid., 49)

Thus everything that belongs to the individual is attributed to his or her public sphere, in which everyone is responsible only for themselves and in which—despite the equality of all members of society—it is still possible to shine with one's own uniqueness and unrepeatability.

> But society equalizes under all circumstances, and the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual. (ibid., 41)

The concept of privacy in the contemporary sense has been transferred to the level of individuality in the West and eventually formed through processes of modernization in Europe and the United States in the 20th century. Here it is worth

noting the incredibly influential article entitled *The Right to Privacy*, published in 1890 in the journal *Harvard Law Review* by legal experts Samuel D. Warren and Louis Brandeis. In it, the authors defined the concept of privacy as "the right to be let alone" (Warren and Brandeis 1890, 193). The right to privacy is one of the universal human rights and is protected in all liberal democracies. At this point, it is worth recalling the difference between the word "privacy" in English and the word "intimacy" in many other European languages. The English word "privacy" covers the concepts covered in German, for instance, by two words, namely intimate sphere and private sphere (*Intimsphäre, Privatsphäre*), where the sphere of intimacy denotes an even narrower (i.e. even more internal) sphere than that referred to by the term privacy.

Modern digital technologies, admittedly, can cause a fundamental reduction or often even a complete loss of privacy, which is threatened not only by devices such as surveillance cameras and facial and motion recognition technology, but also by a range of useful and nowadays almost indispensable digital products that facilitate everyday life, such as smartphones and bank cards. It is often virtually impossible to escape such ubiquitous devices from technological control. The sphere of privacy is often even more threatened by virtual identities that people create in online networks and that are theoretically preserved for all time, surviving even the death of the individual who brought them into being. It is therefore no coincidence that in the shadow of online environments, the discourse on privacy has changed from the "right to be left alone" to the "right to be forgotten" (see e.g. Santor 2014; Pagallo and Durante 2014).

In the Euro-American cultural sphere, fears that their virtual identities will become objects of heteronomous manipulation in the form of diverse digital objects over which individuals have no control have certainly become one of the main reasons for resistance to any kind of centralized use of digital technologies by the state.

Many see a viable way out of this dilemma in the possibility of founding digital cooperatives that are structured according to grassroots democratic principles.[8] In

8 One example of a digital cooperative in Taiwan is the "Taiwan Association of Digital Cultural Content Industry" (TADCCI), also known as "DIGI+". DIGI+ is a non-profit organization that was established in 2011 with the aim of promoting the development of Taiwan's digital content industry. DIGI+ operates as a cooperative by bringing together content creators, distributors, and consumers. The cooperative model allows members to share resources and knowledge, collaborate on projects, and collectively negotiate better deals with suppliers and customers. In this sense, DIGI+ serves as an example of how digital cooperatives can help foster innovation and collaboration in emerging industries, while also providing benefits to their members and contributing to the overall development of their communities (see DIGI+ Taiwan).

such associations, digital data belong to the cooperative members, who manage and use them for purposes that do not involve control of the individual by the community, nor do they have the exclusive goal of making a profit, but rather are guided by the aim of achieving transparent justice for all members. The beginnings of such cooperatives can be found in Europe and the United States as well as throughout Asia and especially in the Sinic region or East Asia, with the exception of North Korea and China, where, of course, the politics of the strong arm and general control prevail.

Intimacy and Privacy in the Sinophone Context

The idea itself, as well as the concrete practice of digital cooperatives, is probably most prevalent in Taiwan, which also has a minister without a portfolio for Digital Affairs. Minister Tang Feng (Audrey Tang),[9] who contributed in important ways to Taiwan's unforeseen success in limiting and stopping the spread of the recent Covid-19 epidemic by democratically disseminating digital technologies for disease control and tracking accessible medical devices, emphasizes the value of digitization in the context of the widest possible consensus among the entire population; the measures she proposed were based solely on recommendations, as no one was forced to adopt the digital applications used in the process. Nevertheless (or precisely because of this), they were voluntarily used by a large majority of the Taiwanese population. This is why she sees Taiwan's successes in fighting the epidemic, where no general quarantine or self-isolation had to be declared and where the majority of public businesses, shops and even venues such as pubs and restaurants remained open throughout, as a result of the grassroots use of digital technologies. Tang stresses that forced action is by no means an effective means of combating the epidemic: "Any top-down coercion, whether from capitalists or the state, is equally bad" (Audrey Tang in Kim 2020, 12).[10]

In the case of Taiwan, one of the reasons for the acceptance of digital technologies in the fight against the epidemic was certainly the confidence of the majority of the population in the state and their fellow citizens. In China, on the other hand, with the wide acceptance and positive evaluation of the social credit system based on digital control, we see an idea diametrically opposed to that of mutual trust, or privacy protection. Moreover, the Chinese online social network WeChat is more

9 Tang is a transgender person who was known as Tang Zonghan, or Atrijus Tang before her gender transition.

10 For a more concrete description of how digital technologies have served in the process of Covid-19 elimination, see for instance Wang, Ng and Brook (2020, 1341–42).

or less ubiquitous as it increasingly becomes an indispensable part of everyday life and communication, a way to access important information and use public infrastructures, from public transport to libraries. A number of recent studies show that there is a high degree of what might be called the "privacy paradox" in China:

> Users' individual privacy attitudes and behaviour in practice suggest they have a declined sense of their own freedom and right to privacy. A privacy paradox exists when users, while holding a high level of concerns, in reality do little to further the protection of their personal information on WeChat. We argue that once a user has ingrained part of their social engagement within the WeChat system, the incentive for them to remain a part of the system outweighs their requirement to secure their privacy online as their decision-making is largely based on a simple cost-benefit analysis. The power and social capital yielded via WeChat is too valuable to give up as WeChat is widely used not only for private conversations, but also for study or work-related purposes. It further blurs the boundaries between the public, the professional and the private, which is a rather unique case compared with other social media around the world. (Chen and Cheung 2018, 1)

The omnipresent system of social credit, which for Westerners often evokes associations with Orwell's society of total control, since it is also directly linked to rewards and punishments, is widely accepted in China, and its implementation has met with little domestic criticism.[11] On the other hand, it is also worth noting that since the 2020s, China has begun to pass a series of laws designed to protect individuals' right to privacy online. Of course, these laws, which many experts believe are far too weak and carry only symbolic weight in practice, will apply only to individuals and companies that trade in digital data, not to the central government, which uses the ubiquitous system to digitally monitor citizens' "social credibility" (see Wu 2020).

Of course, in principal attitudes towards digital objects in China—and as a tendency across the whole Sinic cultural-linguistic area—differ considerably from Western ones, and this is among other things surely tied to different traditional perceptions of intimacy and privacy.

11 As mentioned above, surveys show that the system is unconditionally accepted by up to 80% of people in China, while 19% of informants remain neutral and only 1% of respondents are against the introduction of this application for the purpose of social control (Kostka 2019, 1573). It is interesting to note that acceptance is highest among the upper middle and upper classes, the rich and the most highly educated (ibid., 1565).

In classical Chinese we find no term corresponding to intimacy in the original European sense. The closest we find is the term *neizi* (内自), which means "the inner self". However, we find this term predominantly in Confucian sources, where it takes on an intense moral connotation as a sphere that must be constantly reexamined in the process of cultivating one's personality (*neizi sheng* 内自省); the situation is similar when it comes to the term *jixin* (己心) which refers to an individual's "own heart-mind". This term is used in Confucianism as something that must be self-controlled (*keji* 克己), whereas in Buddhism it is tied to the illusory nature of the Self and therefore practically non-existent.

Nevertheless, a parallel could be drawn between the abovementioned original meaning of *intimus* (i.e., "that which is furthest from the edge" or "the innermost") and the traditional Chinese word for the self or individual (*shen* 身). In the holistic classical view of the relationship between human beings, society, and the cosmos, this term was understood as the center, which expands in concentric circles to include first the family, then the state, society, and finally the entire cosmos (Zhang 2016, 3). For example, let us examine Mencius's image of such a concentric order: "The basis of the cosmos is the state, the basis of the state is the family, and the basis of the family is the individual" (*Mengzi* s.d., Li Lou I, 5).[12] This is expressed even more clearly than in Mencius' quote in *Guanzi*, who describes this concentric order in reverse sequence, saying "The cosmos is the basis of the state, the state is the basis of the districts, the districts are the basis of the families, and the families are the basis of the individuals" (*Guanzi* s.d., Quan Xiu 9).[13] If we are dealing with individuals who are not "ordered" at their core, if their intimacy (i.e., that which is closest to the center, the innermost) is in a chaotic state, we will have a hard time ordering the state and politics (ibid.).[14] In this sense, this most central element of the concentrically ordered society—even if it is "that which is furthest from the margin"—is nevertheless not comparable to intimacy, since it is politicized, or at least the object of the desires of those in power to be politicized, ordered, and consequently controlled. A tamed intimacy is admittedly no longer an intimacy, but something else. In this sense, the term *si* (私), which is now translated into English as privacy, might be closer to intimacy than any of the three previously given terms.

This term is much more widespread in Chinese tradition, but it usually has a negative connotation, since nowadays it is mostly used in constructed words expressing

12 天下之本在國，國之本在家，家之本在身。

13 天下者，國之本也；國者，鄉之本也；鄉者，家之本也；家者，人之本也；人者，身之本也；身者，治之本也。

14 有身不治，奚待於人？

selfishness or egoism (*zisi* 自私) and exclusive focus on one's own interests (*zisi zili* 自私自利), hiding something (of one's own) from others (*yinsi* 隐私), smuggling (*zousi* 走私), and so on. Its etymological meaning comes from a character composed of two radicals, the first of which (*he* 禾) represents the ear or seedling of a rice plant and the second (*si* 厶) means privacy in the sense of what one hides from others.[15] According to the *Guangyun* dictionary from the Song and Ming dynasties, one could also infer that—because of the radical *he* 禾 (rice plant)—the whole character *si* 私 also carries the meaning of privacy in the sense of private property, as it is meant to refer to those rice plants that are not allowed to be harvested by others (and thus remain private property of the individual, see *Guangyun* s.d., *Si*, 1). Such a connotation of the word *si* 私, which thus denotes private property, stands in sharp contrast to the word public, *gong* (公), which has in its entire semantic-conceptual development in Sinic regions an almost exclusively positive meaning, since it is based on justice or equal sharing[16] and can denote both a just father, ancestor, or ruler, and the old Confucian socialist idea in which everything under heaven is public and the property of all.[17]

The other radical of the character *si* (私) (the one on the right) has the same pronunciation as the whole character, namely *si* (厶). This component of the character *si* (私) carries connotations of inappropriate sexual relations and debauchery, as defined in the oldest dictionary, the *Shuowen jiezi,* as *jianxie* 姦衺, i.e. a word meaning betrayal and deceit, composed of two characters, one signifying adultery and the other provocative dress.

Originally, then, the Chinese understood the concept of privacy as something associated with nefarious secrets. Even in formal dictionaries of legal terms, the word translated as privacy in English, namely *si* 私, is defined as *yinsi* 隐私 and described as a term denoting indecent behavior in public and illicit sexual relations, as in prostitution and adultery, or even pedophilia or rape (Cao 2005, II).

It is not uncommon, therefore, for most people to understand privacy as something not to be talked about in public and not to be revealed. Therefore, when their privacy is threatened and someone tries to invade their private sphere, they

15 This radical (namely, *si* 厶) also occurs in the term comparable to the Western notion of public, namely, the word *gong* 公. According to the dictionary *Shuowen jiezi*, *gong*, which is composed of the radical *si* and a roof or something that covers everything (*ba* 八), represents the opposite of what is expressed by *si*. Here the authors cite Han Feizi, who writes that the word *gong* 公 (i.e., public), meaning the equal division, is opposite (*bei* 背) to the term *si* 厶 (i.e., that which is hidden or forbidden to the public, see *Shuowen jiezi* s.d., 716).

16 The definition of this term in the *Shuowen jiezi* dictionary (Ba bu 516) is as follows: 公: 平分也 (The public is evenly divided).

17 天下為公 (*Li ji* s.d., Li Yun, 1).

tend to ignore it as long as it does not cross tolerable boundaries. As a result, they often resolve such issues themselves rather than in a court of law. Moreover, the privacy protection system in China is still too weak and incomplete. All of this is an obstacle to the establishment of an all-encompassing and efficient protection system in this area (ibid.).

On the other hand, privacy was considered an important virtue even in classical Confucianism. In the Confucian *Analects*, for example, we can read, "Do not look, do not listen, do not say, and do not do what is not in accordance with ritual propriety" (*Lunyu* s.d., Yanyuan 1).[18] In the original Confucianism, it was important that everyone in private only cared about the things that concerned themselves. Rumor mongering and malicious gossip were therefore considered immoral.

Many authors (e.g. Tang and Dong 2006) emphasize other aspects of traditional morality, pointing out that pre-modern Sinic societies never developed the concept of individual privacy because of relational ethics. Instead, privacy was only important in the context of the family, which, as we have seen, was an important and fundamental unit of social ethics.

> Thus, the Chinese tend to define *public* and *private* in abstract ethical terms, while the Westerners tend to define them in sociospatial terms. Similarly, members within the Chinese family are clearly differentiated from nonfamily members. Holding back family information from nonfamily members is considered a virtue in the Chinese culture. On the other hand, holding back information from family members, especially from the family head, is considered a violation of family tradition. Hence, privacy in China is not an issue for individuals but an issue for the family. (Tang and Dong 2006, 289)

Such a model of familial privacy is based on the traditional Confucian ethic of relationality or relationalism, which is linked to the paradigm of society or community in relation to the individual, and is to different extents still preserved in most Sinophone societies.

Conclusion

But irrespectively of our native cultural environments, people on the entire planet were united (perhaps for the first time in history) by the isolation and suspension of normal life in the face of the recent pandemic of Covid-19, which has spread

18 非禮勿視，非禮勿聽，非禮勿言，非禮勿動。

worldwide between 2020 and 2023. For the first time, we have all found ourselves globally in a position of all-encompassing isolation from social life and thus from the public sphere (see Delakorda Kawashima 2022, 45; Ito-Morales 2022, 69; Picerni 2022, 123). Our privacy has become completely subjectivized, as a merely digital contacts that were the only ones allowed, did not permit closer formation and maintenance of interpersonal bonds, which requires physical contact, whether through work or simply socializing.

In this way, our private sphere has become a prison that cannot replace what happens outside of it and can never perceive the actual reality, which is much more than the sum of individual aspects of life and digital images of our fellow human beings (Sernelj 2022, 161). In such situations, everyone is left alone with their own subjectivity, and this paralyzes us in our most intimate human essence, which no longer has access to the "real world". The latter can only reveal itself to us if the objects in it can be seen, heard and felt by many people from different perspectives, while the identity (or "being") of these objects does not change. The reality of our common world is then something that can supposedly only be brought about by a kind of common (or equal) "being" of all the people who live in it: for the vital basis of our life is rooted precisely in the fact that, as members of the same community, whether local or global, we speak of the same objects without being prevented from doing so by the differences of our starting positions. A global communication is of course linked to such kind of objectivity, and therefore, we must not lose it.

If we lose this objectivity, if the sameness of these objects can no longer be identified and defined, then nothing will be able to save our common human world, least of all the idea of a supposed "common nature" of all human beings.[19]

The precondition for such an understanding, paradoxical as it may sound, is precisely the diversity of our individual lives and our unique and unrepeatable contributions to objective reality. For the identity (or "being") of each object, its permanent "sameness" with itself, can only be preserved by being constantly reflected in the mirror of human plurality.

If such a plurality is not possible, each person becomes completely private without even being able to perceive, and more importantly, to understand, what is being

19 This idea suggests that if we lose our ability to be objective, we will no longer be able to identify and define the sameness of objects in the world. In other words, we will lose our ability to recognize and understand the commonalities that exist between different things. This means that without a shared understanding of the world and its objects, we will be unable to cooperate and work together effectively as a society. This implies that simply believing that all humans share a common nature is not sufficient to create a shared understanding of the world, and that we need objectivity and the ability to identify and define sameness to achieve this.

shown, presented, and spoken by others. In this sense, it makes no difference whether the basic unit of this new privacy is the individual, the family, or the household. This kind of radical privacy does not change in the slightest, even if the same experience is experienced countless times in the consciousness of countless people in countless different ways (Arendt 1998, 58).

To be human is always to be existentially dependent on the plurality and diversity of all the different human perspectives. In this context, it is important to recognize and address the potential dangers that can arise in digital reality. It is crucial that we work to mitigate these dangers by promoting such multiplicity of worldviews, but also by developing critical thinking, and responsible use of technology to ensure that we can harness the power of digital reality while avoiding its pitfalls.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
HUMANISM, POST-HUMANISM AND TRANSHUMANISM IN TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: Asian and European Paradigms

Human and Non-Human Beings

Early Confucian "Human Supremacy" and Its Daoist Critique

*Hans-Georg MOELLER**

Abstract

The early Confucian texts *Mengzi* 孟子 and *Xunzi* 荀子 introduce strict distinctions between the human and non-human realms and formulate genealogies and theories of "human supremacy". Starting from the claim that humans are superior to animals and other non-human beings, they draw the sociopolitical conclusion that the former ought to enact supremacy by dominating and domesticating the latter. Taking up non-humanist ideas formulated in the *Laozi* 老子, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子forcefully challenges those genealogies and theories. Numerous stories in the *Zhuangzi* express a Daoist anti-humanism seeking to subvert "humanist supremacy", and, especially, its sociopolitical and moral practice. It is concluded that this specific Daoist anti-humanism is embedded in a wider project of promoting a state of human ease, and that its function is therapeutic rather than ideological.

Keywords: humanism, anti-humanism, Mengzi, Xunzi, Zhuangzi

Zgodnjekonfucijanska »človekova superiornost« in njena daoistična kritika

Izvleček

Zgodnjekonfucijanski besedili *Mengzi* 孟子 in *Xunzi* 荀子 uvajata strogo razlikovanje med človeškim in nečloveškim svetom ter oblikujeta genealogije in teorije »človekove nadvlade«. Izhajajoč iz trditve, da so ljudje nadrejeni živalim in drugim nečloveškim bitjem, teksti oblikujejo družbenopolitični sklep, da bi moral človek uveljaviti svojo nadvlado z obvladovanjem ter udomačevanjem živali in drugih nečloveških bitij. *Zhuangzi* 莊子, ki prevzema nehumanistične ideje, oblikovane v besedilu *Laozi* 老子, odločno izpodbija te genealogije in teorije. Številne zgodbe v *Zhuangziju* izražajo daoistični antihumanizem, ki skuša spodkopati »humanistično prevlado«, zlasti pa njeno družbenopolitično in moralno prakso. Ugotovljeno je, da je ta specifični daoistični antihumanizem vpet v širši projekt spodbujanja stanja človeške lahkosti ter da je njegova funkcija terapevtska, in ne ideološka.

Ključne besede: humanizem, antihumanizem, Mengzi, Xunzi, Zhuangzi

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Introduction: Confucian Humanism

Quite rightly, Confucian philosophy (and religion) is often characterized as "humanist". In this context, Tu Wei-Ming, a major spokesperson of contemporary Confucianism, has advocated a "Confucian Humanism as a Spiritual Resource for Global Ethic" (Tu 2009). Tu's approach is representative of a significant part of modern-day academic Confucianism that not only focuses on scholarly exegesis but also aspires to promote Confucianism as a living tradition that can foster human excellence and ethically improve global society. Another example of a such humanist Confucianism of and for today is Roger T. Ames' recent magnum opus *Human Becoming*: *Theorizing Persons for Confucian Role Ethics* (Ames 2021).

Traditional Confucian philosophy lends itself very well to modern humanist readings—after all, one of its central values is *ren* 仁, or "humaneness", and its teachings tend to outline the intricacies of *ren lun* 人倫 or "human relationships". A focus on both *ren* and *ren lun* connects contemporary Confucian philosophers like Tu and Ames with core texts of early Confucianism such as the *Analects*, the *Mengzi*, and the *Xunzi*. More so than contemporary Confucian humanism, however, early Confucian texts attempted to establish a clear distinction between the human and the non-human realms, for instance with regard to the difference between the domains of a "civilized", agricultural society and the wilderness that surrounds and threatens it. A vital concern with separating humans from animals and other living or non-living beings is quite characteristic for early Confucianism and distinguishes it, at least to some extent, not only from modern Confucianism, but, more crucially, from other early Chinese intellectual traditions, and especially from Daoism. In the debates among early Chinese philosophies the distinction human/non-human was in turn distinctive, and the texts or schools of thought which highlight this distinction may be classified as humanist due to an emphasis on human superiority. In contrast, those that challenge this distinction, including Daoism, may be regarded as anti-humanist because they subvert the idea that humans are somehow special. Moreover, the very challenge of human distinctiveness goes along with a sort of methodological non-humanism: it critiques the assumption that what makes humans special ought to be a central question that philosophy addresses.

A significant suggestion of a divide between a Confucian humanism—in the just outlined sense of a serious concern with the distinction between the human and the non-human—and a (at least tendentially) Daoist refusal to prioritize the human is found in *Analects* (18: 6).[1] Here, Confucius (Kongzi 孔子) travels with his

1 All references to chapters and sections in early Chinese texts in this essay follow the database *Chinese Text Project* (n.d).

followers through the countryside searching for a place to cross a river. Encountering two farmers, he sends his student Zilu 子路 to ask them for directions. The ensuing dialogue portrays the farmers in an "agriculturalist" (*nong jia* 農家) or proto-Daoist way. Recognizing Confucius, and apparently displeased with his teachings, they do not answer the question where to find a ford but instead berate Zilu and suggest that rather than following Confucius, he should "follow a man who avoids society" (從辟世之士). This somewhat paradoxical advice (to follow someone who avoids human company) is dismissed by Confucius who insists that he, Confucius, must remain in human company because "with birds and beasts one cannot associate (鳥獸不可與同群)". Confucius' remark points to a difference between Confucian and other teachings of the time hinging on a recognition of the primacy of the human over the non-human realm.

The first main point of this essay is to show that Confucius' indication of the primacy of the human over the non-human is radicalized in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* not merely to a general postulation of human superiority, but, crucially, to a normative plea for human supremacy. Both texts argue not only that humans are "better" than animals and other forms of "wildlife", but—in correspondence with the mode of production in an agrarian society—that they ought to *dominate* and *domesticate* animals and wildlife due to their superiority. The notion of "supremacy" (as in the notorious idea of "white supremacy") draws *sociopolitical interferences* from a supposedly naturalistic difference. Moreover, the second main point of this essay is that the *Zhuangzi*'s critique of Confucianism is also aimed at this sociopolitical idea of human supremacy rather than merely at the dubious claim of a biological or ontological superiority.

Human Supremacy in the *Xunzi* and the *Mengzi*

Possibly alluding to Confucius' remark on the impossibility to associate (*qun* 群) with animals in *Analects* (18: 6), the *Xunzi* later formulated an explicit theory of human sovereignty over all other living and non-living beings based on the "capacity to associate" (*neng qun* 能群):

> Water and fire have *qi* (energy), but no life. Grasses and trees have life but no knowledge. Birds and beasts have knowledge, but no righteousness. Humans have energy, life, knowledge, and righteousness. This is why they are the most valuable under Heaven. They are not as strong as bulls and not as fast as horses, but they make use of bulls and horses. How? Because humans can associate and those cannot.

> 水火有氣而無生，草木有生而無知，禽獸有知而無義，人有氣、有生、有知，亦且有義，故最為天下貴也。力不若牛，走不若馬，而牛馬為用，何也？曰：人能群，彼不能群也. (*Xunzi* 9:19)

Put into modern terminology, the *Xunzi* says here that physical entities are material but not biological, plants are biological but not conscious, and animals are conscious but not moral. Only humans are not just material, biological, and conscious, but also moral. The *Xunzi* stipulates that humans can use other creatures for their own purposes and thereby reign supreme "under Heaven" due to their unique ethical quality. "Righteousness" (*yi* 義) not only enables but apparently also entitles humans to dominate a world and to domesticate an animal kingdom lacking morality. Human morality specifically manifests itself in "association". Obviously, "association" (*qun*), here does not simply mean the ability to form groups (bovines and horses also live in groups) but refers to a supposedly exclusively human social formation constituted by ethical relations. The text further explains:

> How can humans associate? Because of separation. How can separation function? Because of righteousness. When separations are righteous, there is harmony. When there is harmony, there is unity. When there is unity, there is strength.
>
> 人何以能群？曰：分。分何以能行？曰：義。故義以分則和，和則一，一則多力. (*Xunzi* 9:19)

Another passage in the *Xunzi* makes it clear that the ethical "separations" (*fen* 分) distinguishing human associations from the groupings of all other creatures are certain hierarchically ordered binaries:

> What make humans human? They have divisions. …. Birds and beasts also have fathers and sons, but they do not have the familiar bond between them. They have males and females, but they do not have the difference between men and women.
>
> 人之所以為人者何已也？曰：以其有辨也。… 夫禽獸有父子，而無父子之親，有牝牡而無男女之別. (*Xunzi* 5:5)

The idea of human primacy that was formulated only implicitly and contextually in the *Analects* is elaborated in the *Xunzi* into an explicit doctrine of human supremacy. Humans are essentially different from, and importantly, entitled to subjugate everything else in the world due to a singular *moral power*: *the virtue of social cooperation stemming from the hierarchy of genders and generations*. This moral power—an ultimately political power transcending materiality, biology, and even

consciousness—is at the core of early Confucian humanism (but not of contemporary Confucian humanism).

The *Xunzi* "proves" that human association, or *qun*, is essentially political by means of (pseudo-) linguistic analysis. The text says: "Rulership (*jun* 君)—What is it? The ability to associate (*qun* 群) 君者，何也？曰：能群也." (*Xunzi* 12:6) The character for "associate" 群 is a composite of the graphic (and probably phonetic) element 君 for "ruler" or "lord", and 羊 for "sheep".[2] Apparently, for the *Xunzi*—a text which heavily engages in pseudo-etymological "logic" in a chapter on the "rectification of names" (*zheng ming* 正名)—this combination shows that human "association" adds the notion of hierarchy to a seemingly egalitarian "herd". Unaware of the essential role of hierarchy in animal life, the *Xunzi* develops a pseudo-rational argument for human exceptionalism grounded on the submission of women to the "rulership" of men and of the younger generation to the "rulership" of the older generation.

The *Mengzi*, which probably predates the *Xunzi*, complements its pseudo-scientific, pseudo-logical, and pseudo-linguistic theory of human superiority with a pseudo-historical genealogy of human moral power. Befitting the often narrative rather than analytic approach of the *Mengzi*, the discourse on human supremacy is both more dynamic and more dramatic here than in the *Xunzi*. In the context of two dialogues in the third chapter of the text, Mengzi attacks rival philosophical and political teachings and defends his own version of Confucianism. In both cases, Mengzi frames his argumentation in a highly antagonistic and almost Manichean storyline. The Confucian tradition, which Mengzi presents himself as being part of, is characterized as a long lineage of founders and defenders of human civilization under constant pressure from the destructive forces of evil. The apparently endless battle between the Confucians and their multiple nemeses is depicted as a perennial conflict between humanity and its non-human or barely human foes. Whereas the *Xunzi* employs the distinction between the human and non-human to formulate a political doctrine of moral power, the *Mengzi* tells great tales of clashes between the human and the non- or subhuman. When reading such passages in the *Mengzi* it seems as if the history of all hitherto existing society has been the history of a struggle for human supremacy.

Somewhat reminiscent of the scenario in the episode in *Analects* 18: 6 discussed above, section 3A: 4 in the *Mengzi* depicts a dispute between two Confucian and "agriculturalist" or proto-Daoist protagonists, namely Mengzi and a certain Chen

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2 An anonymous reviewer points out that the entry on qun 羣 in the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 (11: 6321) suggests that jun 君 serves as a phonetic symbol in this character and therefore does not necessarily have any semantic importance.

Xiang 陳相. Mengzi and Chen Xiang act as competing political advisors or "consultants" to the ruler of the state of Teng 滕. Chen Xiang advocates an egalitarian politics requiring rulers to participate in agricultural production and common labour. Moreover, the prices for goods should be fixed, he proposes, to avoid any unjust profiteering in a free-market economy. Such an egalitarian economy, Chen Xiang suggests, would result in a morally pure society without corruption of "falsity" (*wu wei* 無偽)—echoing a lament in chapter 18 of the *Laozi* which associates "great falsity" (*da wei* 大偽) with Confucian (political) values and regimes.

In his lengthy responses to Chen Xiang, Mengzi focuses primarily on a defence of social and political hierarchy. For him, agriculturalist egalitarianism runs counter to human civilization and flourishing. In line with the *Xunzi*'s proposition that humans are distinct from the non-human realm—and retain sovereignty over it—due to their capacity to cooperate based on gender and generational hierarchy, Mengzi regards the establishment of these hierarchies as the decisive historical step in becoming truly human. He depicts the "invention" of the human relationships (*ren lun* 人倫) that subordinate women to men and the younger to the older by early Confucian sage rulers as the final achievement that truly separated the human from the non-human world. Hierarchical gender and generational relations are portrayed as the culmination of a long and difficult process of purifying humanity. Faintly comparable to the early Greek philosophical trope of the mind's efforts to free itself from bodily entanglements, the *Mengzi* invents a historical process of human "liberation" from various non-human afflictions.

Prior to civilization, the *Mengzi* says, the world was "flooded" (*fan lan* 氾濫) with water—a state of nature akin to the "chaotic" primal oneness, which in mythological and Daoist texts of the period is symbolically referred to as *hundun* 渾沌 (Girardot 2008). As a first step toward civilization, the flow of water must be ordered. Accordingly, the regulation of rivers initiates the separation of a human habitat from an inundated Earth. The second obstacle to overcome is unrestrained flora, as "grasses and trees" (*cao mu* 草木) grow everywhere. The flora is kept in check by a separation of agricultural land cultivated by and for humans from a wilderness. But still, "beasts and birds encroached upon men" as D. C. Lau translates the *Mengzi*'s phrasing *qin shou bi ren* 禽獸偪人. This, Mengzi remarks, greatly "bothered" (*you* 憂) the early Confucian sage king Yao 堯. Eventually, another sage named Yi 益 is put in charge to take care of this predicament, and he "set the mountains and valleys alight and burnt them, and the birds and beasts went into hiding" (Lau 1970, 102) (烈山澤而焚之, 禽獸逃匿). In this way, wild animals were expelled from the human realm. However, the external purification of the human world from the fauna is not yet sufficient—the "inner animal" has to be purged as well. Mengzi says: "once [humans] have a full belly and warm clothes

on their back they degenerate to the level of animals if they are allowed to live idle lives, without education and discipline" (Lau 1970, 102) (飽食、煖衣、逸居而無教，則近於禽獸). This inner beastliness again "bothers" (*you* 憂) the Confucian "sages" (*sheng ren* 聖人), and they delegate one of their own to complete their humanist project with the invention of ethics: Xie 契, the "Minister of Education" (*si tu* 司徒), eventually imposes the "human relationships" (*ren lun* 人倫) between fathers and sons, rulers and ruled, husbands and wives, older and younger siblings, and friends on society, and only with these social separations is the separation between humans and animals complete.

It is important to note that *Mengzi*'s genealogy of the separation between the human and the non-human parallels the sequence of the *Xunzi*'s analysis of human supremacy: water (matter)-plants (life)-animals (consciousness)-humans (morality). Clearly, the two passages correspond to one another, and, equally clearly, they both highlight the crucial importance of the hierarchical nature of human relationships which, for both early Confucians, distinguish humans from animals. After all, Mengzi's point in presenting his narrative is to argue against Chen Xiang's egalitarianism. For Mengzi, just as for the *Xunzi*, the decisive idea is not that humans live in groups, or that there are age and sex differences among them—animals, too, live in groups, and individual animals differ in age and sex—but the hierarchical order between genders and generations structuring the early Chinese family or clan organization. This hierarchical order is, according to both the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, exclusively human and the foundation of human cooperation and political power. Mengzi's humanist genealogy has the function of justifying his central doctrine of political hierarchy in his arguments against Chen Xiang's egalitarianism:

> There are those who use their minds, and there are those who use their muscles. The former rule, the latter are ruled. Those who rule are supported by those who are ruled. This is a principle accepted by the whole Empire. (Lau 1970, 101)
>
> 勞心者治人，勞力者治於人；治於人者食人，治人者食於人：天下之通義也.

Exactly like in the *Xunzi*, for Mengzi humans are distinguished from everything else in the world by their *righteous* (*yi* 義) power structure. This righteousness stems from the submission of women and the young. For both Xunzi and Mengzi this ethical practice constitutes political power relations between the rulers and the ruled, which in turn ground human supremacy in the world.

In the context of its pseudo-historical approach, the *Mengzi* emphasizes more

than the *Xunzi* the precariousness of human supremacy. It has not been easy for the early Confucian sages to differentiate the human realm from its hostile natural environment, he stresses. Human civilization or culture is fragile and must be constantly defended against various non-human challenges. There is not only a dangerous non-human environment "out there", but also a latent non-human, or sub-human component within humanity. This causes constant concern and "bothers" the Confucian rulers caring for humanity. They are always in a state of worry, it seems from Mengzi's genealogy, and busy with protecting humans from "animalistic" advances. Two methods are at their disposal: To repel the inner animal, ritual and moral regimes are devised. To repel certain "animalistic" people who do not submit themselves to Confucian rule, more drastic measures are needed. The "barbarians" must be eliminated. Mengzi warns his interlocutor Chen Xiang quite frankly what treatment may await him if he continues to spread his egalitarian teachings:

> Now you turn your back on the way of your teacher in order to follow the southern barbarian with the twittering tongue, who condemns the way of the Former Kings … The *Lu sung* says: "It was the barbarians that he attacked; it was Jing and Shu that he punished". It is these people the Duke of Zhou was going to punish, and you want to learn from. (Lau 1970, 104, transcription modified)
>
> 今也南蠻鴃舌之人，非先王之道，子倍子之師而學之，…《魯頌》曰：『戎狄是膺，荊舒是懲。』周公方且膺之，子是之學。」

The "southern barbarians" (*man* 蠻) come from a region historically associated with Daoist ideas or practice (Alberts 2007), and are, for Mengzi, just as dangerous to Confucian humanism as "the barbarians" of the west and the north (*rong di* 戎狄) were to the Confucian model ruler, the Duke of Zhou (Zhou Gong 周公). Mengzi implies that Chen Xiang deserves the same fate as these tribes if he spreads their anti-humanist egalitarianism, and thus that he ought to be "punished".

In *Mengzi* (3B: 14), Mengzi presents another version of his humanist genealogy, again in the context of an antagonistic opposition between his version of Confucianism and other competing ideologies. This time, the opponents are "Yangists and Mohists" (Yang Mo 楊墨).[3] Once more, Mengzi outlines how in antiquity great floods had to be channelled to carve out a human agricultural habitat and how "the birds and beasts harmful to men were annihilated", and "only then were

3 See Lee (2022) on the conflict between Mengzi, and "Yangists and Mohists".

the people able to level the ground and live on it" (Lau 1970, 113) (鳥獸之害人者消，然後人得平土而居之）. Then, Mengzi describes in more detail how the initial cleansings of the human realm were repeatedly spoiled by corrupt rulers and/or barbarian invaders. Again, it took the combination of ethical or ritual regimes and military violence—symbolized respectively by the Confucian model rulers King Wen (Wen Wang 文王), or "King Culture", and King Wu (Wu Wang 武王), or "King Warfare"—to suppress the evildoers. And again, Mengzi describes the effects of "barbarian" rule as a de-humanization of the human world: "with the multiplication of parks, ponds, and lakes, arrived birds and beasts" (Lau 1970, 113) (沛澤多而禽獸至）so that the Confucian rulers needed to drive "tigers, leopards, rhinoceroses, and elephants to the distant wilds" (Lau 1970, 113) (驅虎、豹、犀、象而遠之）. In parallel to this exorcism of wildlife, the Duke of Zhou exterminated foreign people, as Mengzi proudly declares: "He waged war on Yan for three years and punished its ruler to death. He drove Fei Lian to the edge of the sea and executed him. He extinguished fifty states" (Lau 1970, 113, translation and transcription modified) (伐奄，三年討其君，驅飛廉於海隅而戮之。滅國者五十）.

The ancient physical threat to human supremacy by wild animals and barbarians, Mengzi argues, has now been replaced by the ideological danger of "Yangists and Mohists". These "beastly" thinkers, Mengzi explains, are bound to destroy Confucian culture, and reduce humanity to an animalistic level with their "heretic" (*xie* 邪) egalitarian teachings that question the sociopolitical hierarchies between the rulers and the ruled:

> Yang advocates everyone for himself, which amounts to a denial of one's prince. Mo advocates love without discrimination which amounts to a denial of one's father. To ignore one's father on the one hand, and one's prince on the other, is to be no different from the beasts. … If the way of Yang and Mo is not silenced, and the way of Confucius is not proclaimed, the people will be deceived by heresies and the path of morality will be blocked. When the path of morality is blocked, then we show animals the way to devour men, and sooner or later it will come to men devouring men. (Lau 1970, 114, translation modified)
>
> 楊氏為我，是無君也；墨氏兼愛，是無父也。無父無君，是禽獸也. … 楊墨之道不息，孔子之道不著，是邪說誣民，充塞仁義也。仁義充塞，則率獸食人，人將相食.

As in his discussion with the agriculturalist Chen Xiang, Mengzi commends the banishment and extermination of the promoters of non-Confucian teachings:

> Confucius completed the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and struck terror into the hearts of rebellious subjects and undutiful sons. The *Book of Odes* says: "It was the barbarians that he attacked; it was Jing and Shu that he punished. There was none who dared stand up to me". The Duke of Zhou wanted to punish those who ignored father and prince. I, too, wish to follow in the footsteps of the three sages in rectifying the hearts of men, laying heresies to rest, opposing extreme action, and banishing excessive views. (Lau 1970, 115, transcription modified)
>
> 孔子成《春秋》而亂臣賊子懼。《詩》云：『戎狄是膺，荊舒是懲，則莫我敢承。』無父無君，是周公所膺也。我亦欲正人心，息邪說，距詖行，放淫辭，以承三聖者.

According to Mengzi, his philosophical opponents are "those who ignored father and prince" (*wu fu wu jun* 無父無君) and therefore it is not only ethically justified but also politically necessary to treat them as the Duke of Zhou treated the barbarians, i.e., to expel them from the human community by any means. In accordance with Xunzi's logic, Mengzi assumes that human supremacy—human distinction from and rule over everything non-human—depends on the internalization, habitualization, and socio-political practice of the "righteousness" of the domination of men over women, of the older over the younger, and the rulers over the ruled. Whenever this righteousness is challenged, humankind is destined to not only lose its internal humanity but also the "strength" which allows it to separate itself from wilderness and barbarianism. Mengzi cultivates an early Confucian *Angst* of the barbarian in and among humans who needs to be vigorously held in check by "culture" and war lest the human is once more corrupted and reduced to animality. Moreover, this danger is always imminent:

> Mencius said, Slight is the difference between man and beast. The common man loses this distinguishing feature, while the gentleman retains it. (*Mengzi* 4B: 47; Lau 1970, 131, translation modified)
>
> 孟子曰：人之所以異於禽於獸者幾希，庶民去之，君子存之.

Both the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* take the concern with human primacy that is already present in the *Analects* to an extreme. There, in section 2: 7, Confucius expressed the expectation that humans ought to differ from animals (he mentions dogs and horses) by not only nourishing one another, but by also "respecting" (*jing* 敬) their

elders, presumably by emotionally and behaviourally committing themselves to be at their service. This notion of "respect" is, already in the *Analects*, extended to a plea for internalizing gender, generational, and political hierarchies as paradigmatically expressed in the famous "categorical imperative" in *Analects* 12: 11: "Treat the ruler as ruler, and the subordinate as subordinate. Threat the father as father, and the son as son" (君君，臣臣，父父，子子). In the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, however, these hierarchies are not only elevated to *the* defining human characteristic, but to the very means by which humans achieve domination over a non-human nature and their own supposedly animalistic flaws. In different rhetorical ways, the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* formulate an early Confucian philosophy of human supremacy. This human supremacy is precarious, and accordingly early Chinese Confucianism humanism promotes the systematic repression of any internal or external "beasts" who "ignore father and prince"—a repression that at times can go as far as genocide.[4]

Daoist Critiques of Human Supremacy

As the two dialogues between Mengzi and his non-Confucian interlocuters discussed above show, one important way in which Confucianism differed from competing schools of thought in early China was by the advocacy of a kind of human exceptionalism. Mengzi's rhetoric suggests that agriculturists, Daoists, Yangists, and Mohists alike threaten to return humankind to "the state of a beast". Only Confucianism, it seems, is a true humanism that not only values human distinctness, but, more importantly, ensures human supremacy over non- or sub-human

4 An anonymous reviewer rightly remarked that my readings of the Mengzi and Xunzi emphasize "hierarchy, patriarchy, and human domination of the natural world, while ignoring the passages concerning conservation and sustainability with respect to the environment". The topic of this essay, however, is human domination of the natural world, and not environmental sustainability. While, from a contemporary perspective, the discourses on human domination and environmental sustainability in agriculture may contradict one another, they were complementary for early Confucians. The same reader suggests that I refer to Graham Parkes' essay on "The Art of Rulership in the Context of Heaven and Earth" (Parkes 2018) to discuss environmentalism in the Mengzi. In this essay, Parkes writes the following about Mengzi's famous allegory of the Ox Mountain (Mengzi 6A: 8): "Mencius goes on to draw an analogy between the Ox Mountain and the human being: just as the mountain loses its nature when deprived of its natural cover of vegetation, so if we humans 'let go our true heart' we lose the natural endowment of humanity and become like animals. There's an implication that it also works the other way round: the same desires that are destroying our natural environment are also eating away at our own nature as humans. If we fail to protect the natural covering of the mountain, we end up no better than the animals that help denude it" (Parkes 2018, 73). For Mengzi, their potential concern with environmental sustainability—in the context of an agricultural society—makes humans superior to animals (and justifies human domination of animals).

forces. Philosophically, Mengzi's point is not completely unfounded. Daoists texts in particular tend to deny a clear distinction between the human and non-human and rarely, if ever, assume human supremacy (Parkes 1989). Instead, they tend to highlight human frailty, and emphasize a continuity between the human and non-human realms. Importantly, as Mengzi correctly stresses, these differences between Confucian humanism and non-Confucian non-humanism correspond to major moral and political disagreements. In other words, just as early Confucian humanism was a philosophical tool to justify specific ethical regimes and power structures, a subversion of the Confucian humanist narrative challenged the legitimacy of those regimes and structures. Early Daoist anti-humanism is a case in point of such a subversion.

The *Laozi* contains numerous sayings and images illustrating the integration of human life, and specifically human society and politics, into the larger functioning of the *dao* 道—or the "course of nature". The often quoted chapter 25, for instance, programmatically declares: "Humans follow the Earth as a rule. The Earth follows Heaven as a rule. Heaven follows *dao* as a rule. *Dao* follows its self-so as a rule" (人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然). Not only is the human world here depicted as a smaller element of a larger whole or process, but, importantly, it also is somehow subordinated to those other non-human entities that it simply "follows". Rather than ruling or regulating the Earth (*di* 地)—which connotes water and soil, and fauna and flora—humans adapt themselves to their terrestrial surroundings.

The Daoist emphasis on human adaptation to a natural environment, as it can be inferred from chapter 25 of the *Laozi*, is quite distinct from the historical struggle against non-human attacks depicted in the *Mengzi*. And yet human integration into the non-human is hardly ever idealized or romanticized in the *Laozi*—and thereby differs from any naïve vision of a blissful unity with the cosmos or a paradisaic "return to nature". Chapter 5 of the *Laozi* suggests that nature does not care about humans—it is not "good" in a moral or divine sense: "Heaven and Earth are not humane. They regard the ten thousand things as straw dogs" (天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗). The metaphor "straw dogs" is commonly interpreted as a reference to ritual objects that were burned after usage. Accordingly, the line seems to highlight the temporality human existence shares with all things, and especially the mortality it shares with all living beings. Humans enjoy no special status or preferential treatment in an amoral nature.

Moreover, from the perspective of the *Laozi*, humans do not seem to have any supreme characteristics imbuing them with distinctive powers. Chapter 23 evokes natural disasters like storms or floods to point out that even nature does not

always maintain a steadily productive course, or, in today's language, it is not always "sustainable". The chapter asks: "If even Heaven and Earth often cannot be long-lasting, how should humans be able to?" (天地尚不能久，而況於人乎？) A central concern of Daoist texts is to achieve permanence (*chang* 常or *jiu* 久) manifesting itself politically in social stability, enduring peace, and durable statehood, and physically in longevity and health. Unlike Confucian texts such as the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, the *Laozi* seems to regard the ethical and political practices associated with Confucianism as often inferior to natural orders. Chapter 23 of the *Laozi* suggests that human society has not achieved the limited level of sustainability of non-human nature.

Far from assuming any "human supremacy", the *Laozi* regards the human realm not as genealogically separated from the non-human realm "under Heaven", but as inevitably embedded in it. It stresses the shared mortality of human beings and nature rather than singling out any distinctly human ethos. And rather than regarding humans as masters of the Earth, or praising human excellence, it tends to view the human world as intrinsically feeble and vulnerable.

The *Zhuangzi* expands the non-humanist philosophy of the *Laozi*. By critically, and often satirically, commenting on or alluding to mainstream Confucian humanist (sociopolitical) philosophy and practices of its time, it can be classified as not merely non-humanist, but as indeed anti-humanist—if this notion is understood as a subversion of the specific narratives of "human supremacy" expressed in such texts as the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*. Because of the impossibility of dating the likely composite text of the *Zhuangzi*, and in the absence of any substantial early manuscripts, this is not to imply that the *Zhuangzi* directly *responds* to the *Mengzi* or *Xunzi* (indeed, parts of the *Zhuangzi* may well precede the *Xunzi* and perhaps the *Mengzi* in time), but that it counters narratives and ideologies of the time conveyed in these texts.

It has been frequently noted that one of the main literary characteristics of the *Zhuangzi* distinguishing it from most other texts of the period is its ample use of non-human protagonists and figures, ranging from animals and plants to mythological or fantastic beings (Parkes 2013). Moreover, the human characters populating the many stories and allegories of the *Zhuangzi* are often at the fringes of "respected" humanity: there are "barbarians" and hermits, criminals and cripples, tricksters and "madmen". Often, these social outcasts challenge or ridicule "regular" members of society and the common social etiquette and hierarchies they represent. The non-human or unconventionally human cast of the *Zhuangzi* illustrates the non-humanist philosophy of the *Laozi* with a plethora of concrete faces and bodies.

Probably the most widely known story of the *Zhuangzi* is the butterfly dream allegory at the end of the second chapter of the text (*Qi Wu Lun* 齊物論), which in turn is often regarded as the philosophically most significant section of the whole book. The story is about Zhuang Zhou—the presumed author of the text—falling asleep, dreaming of flying around as a butterfly, and then waking up again. It is highly complex and, like many stories in the *Zhuangzi*, allows for various interpretations. Without venturing into an analysis of its multiple possible readings, I wish to focus here on its rather concise final "conclusion": "Between Zhou and the butterfly there is, necessarily, a separation. This is called the transformation of things" (周與胡蝶，則必有分矣。此之謂物化).

Interestingly, the *Zhuangzi* also explicitly affirms here—in the same terminology as the *Xunzi*—a "separation" (*fen* 分) between the human and the non-human, represented by a person and a butterfly (in the person's dream). Unlike in the *Xunzi*, however, this separation is not portrayed as hierarchic and therefore moral ("righteous"), but as a sequential separation in the context of the "transformation of things" (*wu hua* 物化). Clearly, the emphasis is on the *change* from one *thing* to another constituting, in essence, the "way", or "course" (*dao* 道) of nature. Moreover, it is evident from the context in the chapter that the waking/dream transition is intended to be an analogy to the transition from life to death (Moeller 1999). Additionally, the image of the butterfly also suggests the idea of metamorphosis in nature, i.e., the alteration of different life forms. Whatever the specific reading of the story as a whole may be, it depicts the "separation" between the human and the non-human realms as not just a division but also a continuity where each can dissolve into the other.

The iconic butterfly dream story—drawings or animations of Zhuang Zhou tend to show him in the company of a butterfly, as an image search on Google will inevitably show—connects with other well-known narratives in the *Zhuangzi* highlighting the transformation of the human into the non-human in death. When Zhuangzi's wife dies, he consoles himself by reflecting on how her human life was merely a transitory phase of existence in a cosmic process of change (*bian* 變) which constantly transforms the non-human into the human and vice versa (*Zhuangzi* 18: 2). Similarly, another story tells of four friends joking about how they will be transformed once they die: maybe the left arm will become a rooster, the right arm a crossbow for hunting birds, and the mind may turn into a horse (*Zhuangzi* 6: 5).

In a somewhat light-hearted way, the stories about the "transformation of things" in the *Zhuangzi* address the human fear of death reflecting the existential *Angst* also expressed in the *Mengzi* that the human may be overcome by the non-human.

In connection with the *Laozi*'s insight into the integration of human life in non-human nature, however, the *Zhuangzi* tries to alleviate the fear of death by affirming the dissolution of the human body and mind as an integral moment of the course of *dao*. When dealing with the predicament of mortality, the *Zhuangzi* seeks solace in letting go of any pretence of human exceptionalism.

Another iconic story in the *Zhuangzi* (although not quite as well-known as the butterfly dream allegory) is the tale of Hundun's death at the very end of the Inner Chapters (7: 7). Here, the mythological figure of Hundun, representing a yet undivided primal state of complete wholeness at the beginning of time, is depicted as a faceless "Emperor of the Centre" (*zhong yang zhi di* 中央之帝) surrounded by the Emperors of the North and South. These two emperors decide to bore seven holes into Hundun to given him with a human face—meant as a reciprocal favour for Hundun's hospitality. However, their well-intentioned act ends up killing Hundun. In a detailed comparative analysis, Nicholas F. Gier came to the following conclusion:

> Most importantly, the original sin in this story is anthropocentrism, a fault that Zhuangzi continually attempts to rectify by constant reference to the nonhuman realm and nonhuman values. (Gier 2000, 212)

Gier correctly observes that the story is an allegorical description of an act of anthropocentrism: Hundun is literally the Emperor of the *Centre*, and his fellow emperors decide to make him *human* (*anthropos* in Greek). Since this anthropocentric activism kills Hundun, the story is anti-anthropocentric: it describes anthropocentrism, as well-intentioned as it may be, as violent and destructive. What is more, the story's emphasis on the moral motivation of the emperors associates them with Confucian ethics and ritual expectations of reciprocity in the context of "human relationships". Importantly, they pity Hundun for his lack of a human face. They regard the non-human realm as inferior and non-human characteristics as a decisive shortcoming. Their reasoning, their misplaced feelings of empathy, and their ritualistic behaviour all betray a Confucian humanism akin to the philosophy of human supremacy found in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*. The story's (partly satirical) critical portrayal of the Emperors of the North and South makes it not just anti-anthropocentric but, more specifically, also an example of early Daoist anti-humanism.

In effect, the allegory of Hundun's death is a "kill story". It illustrates the murderous consequences of the cultural and sociopolitical project of forcefully humanizing the non-human. Upon closer inspection, many similar stories depicting in one way or another the destruction of non-human life by well-meaning agents of early

Chinese humanism can be found. One of the best-known of these kill stories, featuring Zhuangzi himself, is included in the biographical note on Zhuang Zhou in the *Shiji* 史記 (63: 10), the *Records of the Historian* (1st century BCE). A shorter, somewhat less coherent version of the story is also included in the Miscellaneous Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* (32: 15). The inclusion of this story in the brief account of Zhuang Zhou's life and work in the *Shiji*, which consists of merely a few sentences, suggests that it was regarded as representative of both Zhuang Zhou's personal character and of his philosophy. It reports that Zhuang Zhou refused the offer of a high government office by pointing to the fate of sacrificial oxen (*xi niu* 犧牛) at a ruler's court. Such oxen were given luxurious treatment: they were well dressed and well fed for a while, and in this way hosted like honoured guests, only to be later slaughtered and eaten.

The reference to court ritual in this paradigmatic story combines multiple critical jabs at the Confucian humanism of the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*: First, it critically, and again somewhat satirically, disrespects monarchic lordship (*jun*). Zhuang Zhou resists supporting such a sovereign—and this makes him politically subversive and, from a Confucian perspective, as "animalistic" as those Yangists and Mohists who are chastised by Mengzi for ignoring the prince. Second, and like the allegory of Hundun's death, it satirically debunks Confucian humanist morality as hypocritical. The sacrificial oxen are treated with ostensible politeness and "righteousness", as if in a "human relationship". However, the ethical pretence of doing good and of superior human cultivation turns out to be brutal and selfish exploration. The humanist façade breaks down when the oxen are eventually killed and consumed. Third, the story parodically alludes to the early Confucian celebration of the sage ruler's extermination of animals and their expulsion from the human realm. The killing of the sacrificial oxen at the ruler's court ritually re-enacts the ancient cleansing of the human world of wildlife in the course of the establishment of human supremacy.

The story of the killing of the seabird in in the Outer Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* (18: 5) corresponds to the anecdote of Zhuang Zhou and the sacrificial oxen in the *Shiji*. Here, the ruler of the state of Lu—Confucius' home state which is typically associated with the political practice of his teachings—finds an exotic bird. He orders the bird to be brought to his court where he hosts it for days in accordance with the rituals for special guests or diplomatic missions. Long musical performances are presented to entertain the bird and it is offered exquisite meat to eat. The text highlights that all this is intended to make the bird "happy" (*le* 樂) and to do "good" (*shan* 善). However, not despite but precisely because of this preferred treatment the bird dies after a few days.

The story has been interpreted in a contemporary Confucian humanist manner as a variation of the golden rule expressing a "patient moral relativism" (Huang 2005; 2018). In this way it is understood as a universal normative demand to put "the patient at the central stage of both our moral actions and our moral assessment of these actions" (Huang 2018, 892). Such an interpretation, while correct on an ahistorical, abstract level, ignores the specifics of the narrative. It clearly connects with the main theme of other kill stories in the *Zhuangzi* including the story of Hundun's death and the anecdote of the sacrificial oxen: namely the killing of animals by Confucian ritual. In its concrete historical context, the story expresses a parodic critique of Confucian humanism: a Confucian ruler unintentionally—and thus stupidly—kills an animal by humanizing it. The story's political force, and its bitter humour, lies in its subversion of the early Confucian narrative of "human supremacy". Yes, humans may indeed rule over animals but rather than being an expression of righteousness this rule is exposed as foolish vanity at best and as callous murderousness at worst.

Other kill stories in the *Zhuangzi* critically subvert the Confucian humanist ideal of the domestication of animals and their submission to human use celebrated in the passage from *Xunzi* 9: 19 quoted earlier: "(Humans) are not as strong as bulls and not as fast as horses, but they make use of bulls and horses". Chapter 9 of the *Zhuangzi*, titled "Horse Hooves" (*Ma Ti* 馬蹄) discusses in detail how humans "make use of horses" by describing how Bo Le 伯樂, a legendary horse trainer whose name is just as widely known in China today as it was in early China, treated the animals under his command. Typically, Bo Le is praised as an exemplary and skilful person who could immediately sense a horse's suitability for human purposes. The *Xunzi*, too, mentions him briefly in the chapter on "The Way of the Ruler" (*Jun Dao* 君道) comparing him with regents who control their subjects so well that cannot be deceived by them (12: 9). In the *Zhuangzi*, however, Bo Le is not a positive character, as the text accuses him of slowly killing most of the animals in his "care".

The "Horse Hooves" chapter contrasts the carefree life of wild horses with those unfortunate enough to have been captured and put under Bo Le's command: "He starves them, parches them, trots them, gallops them, lines them up neck to neck or nose to tail, tormenting them with bit and rein in front and whip and spur behind. By then over *half* of the horses have dropped dead" (飢之渴之，馳之驟之，整之齊之，前有橛飾之患，而後有鞭筴之威，而馬之死者已過半矣) (Ziporyn 2020, 81). The chapter concludes with paralleling the effect of Bo Le's training of horses to the Confucian "civilization" of humans. In ancient times, the chapter suggests, people lived a simple and happy life, not much different from wild animals, but: "Then along came the sage, bending and twisting over

ritual and music to reform the bodies of the world, dangling benevolence and responsible conduct overhead to comfort' the hearts of everyone in the world" (及至聖人，屈折禮樂以匡天下之形，縣跂仁義以慰天下之心) (Ziporyn 2020, 83). Contrary to the celebration of the domestication of non-human life as moral improvement, the *Zhuangzi* debunks this humanist narrative as a not so noble lie. The rhetoric of the *Xunzi* and *Mengzi* that makes Bo Le a humanist role model is reversed in the *Zhuangzi*. He, and with him the Confucian supposed sage rulers who domesticated people rather than horses are, from an anti-humanist Daoist perspective, symbols of humanist terror.

The Daoist reversal of the genealogy of human supremacy presented in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* reaches a climax in chapter 29 of the *Zhuangzi*. Here, a lengthy story features Confucius meeting the notorious Gangster Zhi (Dao Zhi 盜跖), the leader of a large criminal gang, with the intention of convincing him to join the ranks of the regular feudal lords. The obviously hypocritical Confucius is contrasted with the grotesque, vile and yet "brutally honest" outlaw. Gangster Zhi represents the hardly human "barbarians" threatening the Confucian "humanist" civilization: in satirical exaggeration, the gangster is introduced as a cannibal snacking on a human liver. Symbolically embodying such drastic anti-humanism, Gangster Zhi eventually not only reveals Confucius as thoroughly corrupt and chases him away, but, in the course of an extended diatribe, turns the Confucian narrative of the glorious history of humanization on its head. He says:

> In the age of Shen Nong, people slept where they happened to be and woke up cheerfully. They knew their mothers, but they didn't know their fathers. They lived side by side with deer. … This was when utmost vitality was abundant. But then came the Yellow Emperor … He slaughtered the native tribes out in the wild, and their blood ran for a hundred miles. Yao and Shun arose … and since then, the strong have always oppressed the weak. Since Tang and Wu everyone brought disorder to humankind.
>
> 神農之世，臥則居居，起則于于，民知其母，不知其父，與麋鹿共處，… 此至德之隆也。然而黃帝 … 與蚩尤戰於涿鹿之野，流血百里。堯、舜作，… 以強陵弱 …。湯、武以來，皆亂人之徒也.

Gangster Zhi, the bizarre anti-hero, presents a strange anti-version of the genealogy of humanist supremacy. The time when humans "lived side by side with deer"—when there was no significant difference between human and animals—is depicted as a golden age. Importantly, this golden age is quite literally described as a time of "ignoring fathers": children "did not know their fathers"—a complete scandal from Mengzi's and Xunzi's point of view. For the gangster, however, the

true scandal is the separation of the human from the non-human, the genocide of native people, and the establishment of human hierarchies between the "strong" and the "weak". In short, the scandal is Confucian "human supremacy".

A Brief Conclusion

The intention of this paper was, first, to show how early Confucian texts such as the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* developed theories and narratives of human supremacy based on a rather strict distinction between the human and non-human realms. Second, the intention was to show how the *Zhuangzi* counters this version of a humanism with a specifically Daoist anti-humanism. I believe it is crucial to recognize this antagonistic historical relation and not to reduce philosophical Daoism to a benign complement of Confucian thought, as has often been the case under the influence of the idea that "the three teachings unite into one" (*san jiao he yi* 三教合一)—which tends to imply that this supposed unity is formed under a comprehensive Confucian roof[5] (Gentz 2013). At the same time, however, it is equally important to acknowledge that the *Zhuangzi* cannot be reduced to such a specific form of critical anti-humanism. To conclude the preceding synopsis of the genesis of a Daoist anti-humanism, I wish to briefly point to the wider philosophical significance of the reference to animals and other non-human beings in the *Zhuangzi*.

As outlined above, I regard the anti-humanism in the *Zhuangzi* as essentially a socio-political critique of early Confucianism. This is by no means to say, however, that I take this anti-humanism to be a straightforward plea for a Daoist "primitivism" (as A.C. Graham has argued with regard to some strands of the text; see Graham 2001) or a demand for an ecologist unity with nature, social escapism, or a sort of pre-historical communism. Instead, I believe that anti-humanist protagonists in the *Zhuangzi*, with Gangster Zhi as a prime example, are typically satirical exaggerations who cannot be taken literally. In short, while it seems evident to me that the *Zhuangzi* presents a thorough critique of the political practice, the historical narratives, and the moral regimes of early Chinese Confucianism, it does not aim at advocating a specific ideological or ethical alternative but is non-ideological and amoral. The *Zhuangzi* is less interested in revolution, and more in existential well-being. Not completely unlike early Greek Stoicism, it

5 As an anonymous referee rightly remarked, the notion of "the three teachings uniting into one" is a later version of the idea that Daoism and Confucianism are mutually complementary (*ru dao hu bu* 儒道互補). The reviewer mentions the popular account attributed to Wei-Jin intellectuals that Daoism offered the political elites some therapeutic relief when they failed to live up to Confucian ideals.

has a therapeutic inclination and promotes social and individual sanity, or, more specifically, "ease", or *you* 遊.

In my view, many of the non-human protagonists and images in the *Zhuangzi* represent such a state of ease that tends to be elusive for humans. After all, the notion of *you* is related to the movement of swimming—an activity that humans often are incapable of or find it hard to excel at, as opposed to, for instance, fish. Other movements exclusive to animals or non-human beings, such as flying, equally symbolize such a state of ease. Paradigmatically the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi* is titled *Xiaovao You* 逍遙遊, or "rambling at ease". It famously starts with a story about two fictional animals, a giant fish and a giant bird (Kun 鯤 and Peng 鵬) transforming into one another. From the very start these non-human (but not anti-humanist) beings introduce the larger theme of *you* which is at the very centre of the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. The famous butterfly allegory also connects with the imagery of flying and represents, even if not explicitly, a state of *you* as well.

In connection with the *Laozi*'s idea that humans are inevitably embedded in a non-human environment and reflecting the *Zhuangzi*'s theme of the "transformation of things" which binds the human and the non-human together in a sequence of continuous change, many "positive" stories in the *Zhuangzi* point to the possibility of humans to somehow realize an "animalistic" state of *you*. Conversely, Confucian and other philosophical, political, and moral teachings and practices of the time are portrayed as obstacles to *you* that make it difficult to achieve ease in society. The anti-humanist "negative" stories discussed in this essay illustrate such obstacles to *you*.

One prime example of the positive *you* stories is the famous dialogue about the "happiness of fish" between Zhuang Zhou and his friend and philosophical opponent Huizi 惠子 (*Zhuangzi* 17: 13). Here, Zhuang Zhou defends his claim that he can know that fish are happy, implying that the human and the non-human realms are not strictly separate. More importantly, though, the dialogue parallels the carefree movement of fish, which is explicitly described as *you*, with the joyful philosophical exchange between the two friends. Its point is, in my reading, to provide an example of human ease. In line with this story, I regard the anti-humanism of the *Zhuangzi* as a philosophical preparation for engaging in the pursuit of human *you*. It is a therapeutic rather than an ideological anti-humanism (see Moeller and D'Ambrosio 2017).

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The Impact of China's Biopolitical Approach to COVID-19 on Pets

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Abstract

Using the frameworks of biopower and uses and gratification theory, this article examines the treatment of pets in China during the COVID-19 outbreak and the role of social media in fulfilling users' social needs by facilitating discussions on associated animal welfare issues and mobilizing animal advocates to take action. The analysis focuses on how social media comments on Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, have influenced public discourse surrounding the biopolitical governance of animals emphasized by the zero-COVID policy, which has helped maintain a strong sense of national consciousness in post-socialist China. The study centres on an isolated case of the killing of a corgi by a health worker in Shanghai and how it was perceived on social media. The findings suggest that much of the animosity demonstrated on Weibo towards the killing is centred around biopower, or the biopolitical governance of humans and animals that has more broadly prioritized human life over animal welfare in China's approach to COVID-19. In this way, social media has played a crucial role in mobilizing animal advocates to take a more prominent role in the emergency management of pets. The study concludes that China should consider adopting a standard operating procedure for pet care and rescue that includes pets in its humans-first disaster response and relief measures to develop a better and healthier national consciousness, fulfil the social needs of its citizens who value animal welfare, and strengthen its sense of national consciousness.

Keywords: COVID-19, China, animal welfare, emergency management, biopower

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Vpliv kitajskega biopolitičnega pristopa do covida-19 na domače ljubljenčke

Izvleček

Pričujoči prispevek, ki je osnovan na teoriji uporabe in gratifikacije ter biomoči, raziskuje, kako so na Kitajskem v času covida-19 obravnavali domače ljubljenčke ter kako so družbeni mediji z razpravami o dobrobiti živali in vzpodbujanjem njihove zaščite izpolnjevali potrebe medijskih uporabnikov. Analiza se osredotoča na vprašanje, kako so družbeni komentarji na Weiboju (tj. kitajski ekvivalent Twitterja) vplivali na javni diskurz o biopolitičnem upravljanju živali v okviru politike ničelne tolerance do covida-19, ki je doprinesla k vzdrževanju močne nacionalne zavesti v postsocialistični Kitajski. Raziskava obravnava specifičen primer, ko je neki zdravstveni delavec iz Shanghaija ubil korgija in kako so se na to odzvali družbeni mediji. Študija ugotavlja, da je sovražnost, ki se je ob tem uboju sprožila na Weiboju, povezana predvsem z biomočjo ali biopolitičnim upravljanjem ljudi in živali – ta politika je namreč dajala prednost človeškemu življenju pred živalskim. Družbeni mediji so tako odigrali ključno vlogo pri mobilizaciji zaščitnikov živali, ki so prevzeli bolj pomembno vlogo pri upravljanju domačih ljubljenčkov v izrednih razmerah. Raziskava se zaključi z razmislekom, da bi Kitajska lahko uvedla standardni postopek za nego in reševanje domačih ljubljenčkov, ki bi jih lahko v svojih odzivih in ukrepih za pomoč ob katastrofah obravnavala skupaj z ljudmi kot enotno skupino in bi tako razvila bolj zdravo nacionalno zavest, izpolnila družbene potrebe tistih svojih državljanov, ki cenijo dobrobit živali, ter s tem tudi okrepila čut za nacionalno zavest.

Ključne besede: covid-19, Kitajska, dobro počutje živali, krizno upravljanje, biooblast

Introduction

The opening-up policies in China's urban areas since the 1980s and 1990s have resulted in a 15% annual growth rate of pet ownership, making cities like Beijing and Shanghai significant pet sales markets (Chan 2018; Xinhua 2021). China has also established several facilities for adopting stray animals, such as the pet adoption service in Nanchang, which opened on January 18th, 2018, and coincided with an "Adoption Day" in 38 other Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai (XinhuaNet 2018). Additionally, Qingdao, a major city in eastern China, held a campaign on March 29th, 2018, encouraging people to adopt stray animals instead of purchasing them (Li 2019). Animal welfare advocates in China are working to find responsible homes for animals in need, and these adoption campaigns are part of these efforts.

However, animal cruelty is on the rise in China despite the country's Buddhist and Daoist history, which emphasizes compassion for all living things as a manifestation of both religious beliefs. In particular, we cannot underestimate the impact that COVID-19 has had on companion animals in China. At the time of the

initial outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, Chinese state media reported that a dog owner in Tianjin had thrown his pet over the side of a building out of fears that it could spread the disease (Lockett 2020). In 2021, when decontamination workers entered a quarantined citizen's home and killed a pet corgi in Shanghai, the state media tried to assuage netizens' hostility by defining the episode as an isolated mistake, and claimed that in fact netizens sympathized with the front-line workers who had been working tirelessly to tackle COVID-19 (Ramzy 2021). On the 6th April 2022, as China battled with a new wave of COVID-19 following months of its zero-COVID policy, media reports began to emerge on Weibo—the Chinese equivalent of Twitter—about another significant incident of brutality towards a pet. The story shared online claimed that a pet corgi was dragged to the roadside to be killed by a health worker in a neighbourhood community in Shanghai (Bloomberg News 2022). According to media sources at the time, the dog's owners had tested positive for COVID-19 and the health worker was worried that the dog was also infected. After the dog was beaten to death, the local authorities merely stated that they would further communicate with the dog's owner and compensate him, and did not express further comments on this incident (Xuan 2022). As a result, this provoked dissatisfaction with the local authority's response and caused widespread and heated discussion among many Chinese people on social media.

Drawing on the frameworks of biopower and uses and gratification theory, this study explores how media posts on Weibo have influenced public discourse surrounding pet safety, rescue, and emergency management within the context of China's humans-first zero-COVID measures, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we examine how Weibo users sough to engage in discussions on Chinese social media with other animal advocates about animal welfare during this historic moment. From the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan to the recent relaxation of COVID policies nationwide in January 2023, the Chinese government has prioritized human life in its response measures (Ding and Zhang 2022). While pet culling incidents in China during the COVID-19 pandemic appear to have been isolated events conducted by health workers and not officially sanctioned by the government, they are indicative of the influence that China's historical biopolitical approach to life has had on the treatment of pets. However, social media discussions about the impact on animals as a result of this approach raise important questions about how China can better manage pets during times of national crises. Our study further highlights how social media has played a key role in mobilizing animal advocates to take a prominent role in the emergency management of pets, fulfilling their needs for social connection and self-expression among the animal rights community.

Overall, we argue that the mismanagement of pets during the COVID-19 pandemic in China has had a detrimental effect on the public perception of the government's ability to manage issues that extend beyond human concerns. This demonstrates that China needs to consider including non-human animals in its disaster response and relief efforts. To achieve this, we suggest that China should adopt a standard operating procedure for pet care and rescue that can be implemented across the country during natural and manmade disasters. Based on our analysis, we also provide possible solutions to better facilitate the emergency management of pets during future crises. This article will be of interest to scholars and policymakers concerned with animal welfare and pet ownership in China, particularly during natural disasters, pandemics, and other unforeseen events.

Context of Pet Management in China

China's Animal Welfare and Animal Epidemic Prevention

Numerous laws currently exist in China with regard to animal protection, including the Wildlife Protection Law (WPL) of 1988 (revised 2004, 2009), Regulations for the Administration of Affairs Concerning Experimental Animals of 1988 (revised 2013), and Regulations on the Administration of Domestic Dogs of 1980. Two draft laws that have yet to be adopted by law-makers also exist—the 2008 Animal Protection Law (APL) and the 2008 Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Law of the People's Republic of China (PCAL) (Sima and O'Sullivan 2016). The PCAL remains the most prominent draft proposal of China's animal welfare legislation (ibid., 2016). However, the fact that these remain draft laws demonstrates that China has not yet approved such animal welfare legislation, and needs to do more to protect non-human animals. Moreover, there is a further general lack of societal concern or knowledge about animal welfare among the Chinese population (Carnovale at al. 2021). Instead, China regularly enforces regionally and locally tailored regulatory frameworks in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, which are aimed at safeguarding human interests in relation to public health and safety. These regulatory frameworks include the "single-dog policy" for households, and sporadic intensive care procedures (Feng 2018). These procedures have included, to name a few, poisonings of untrained or stray dogs that roam or foul public places in major cities like Beijing (Yan 2020); killings of stray cats that cause public concerns relating to noise and hygiene (Fan 2020); and animal beatings and electrocutions as part of large scale culling related to the rabies epidemic in Yunnan province (Watts 2006).

It is worth noting that China did reconsider its plan to kill all pets of COVID-19 patients in 2021 after facing an outcry from citizens (Morris 2022). However, a

health worker's brutal killing of a pet corgi in Shanghai on April 6th, 2022, while its owners were taken away for quarantine, sparked outrage on Chinese social media (Yan 2022b). This was one of several cases of animal cruelty during the COVID-19 pandemic in China. Other reported incidents include local health workers killing pets in Jiangxi province, Hebei province, and in the cities of Harbin, Chengdu, and Wuxi (Ramzy 2021; Baker 2022; Zhu 2021). While the Animal Epidemic Prevention Law (AEPL) of 1997 (revised in 2007, 2013, 2015, and 2021) made unlicensed slaughterhouses illegal, it has also given officials the authority to kill pets showing symptoms of diseases like rabies (World dog Alliance 2021). As per current laws, pet owners are required to leash, vaccinate, and register their pets with municipal authorities to prevent them from both attacking people and spreading contagious diseases (ibid. 2021). However, it is important to note that China's AEPL (as of May 1st, 2021) does not list COVID-19 as an animal epidemic type (Pkulaw.com n.d.a; Guan 2022). Likewise, the Law on the Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases (LPTID) does not cite or authorize measures such as killing pets (Pkulaw.com n.d.b; Guan 2022). In the absence of an epidemic control strategy in cities like Shanghai, district governments are required to notify the Shanghai Municipal People's Government and obtain its approval before implementing emergency measures, including the killing of animals (Guan 2022). Additionally, epidemic prevention and control agencies should provide tangible proof of animal infection through necessary examination for epidemic diseases, as well as notify the owner of the legal basis and their appropriate rights (ibid.).

The previous literature has highlighted the mismanagement and cruelty towards stray animals in China and its negative impact on the public perception of the government, even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak (see Whyke and Lopez 2020). Since the pandemic, research has noted that provincial and municipal authorities in China responded to positive COVID cases by restricting access to public spaces and obliging people to remain in lockdown (Cai and Wei 2022). This response has consequently affected the public information on COVID-19 provided by the national government in managing the crisis (ibid.). Others have noted that the official response to COVID-19 in China has hindered the communication of public information by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in relation to companion animals (Ebenezer et al. 2022). Platto at al. (2022) suggests that this is mainly due to the pandemic being primarily focused on handling humans rather than pets in China.

At least 70% of new infectious diseases are believed to originate from wild animals, and these can spread to people and domesticated animals (Hassell et al. 2017). Given their prevalence in urban areas, companion animals play a crucial role in human-animal interactions. As of the end of 2018, it was estimated that 73.55 million homes in China's urban areas were pet-owning families, with 56.48 million of

these caring for cats and dogs. China's urban areas are now home to approximately 50.85 million dogs and 40.64 million cats (Duo et al. 2020). Because of the public's unavoidable exposure to so many pets in urban areas, there was widespread concern that companion animals may spread COVID-19. The question of whether pet ownership should be allowed during public health crises has also been widely debated. However, there is no concrete evidence that pets can transmit infectious diseases such as SARS or COVID-19 to humans (see Parry 2020). Therefore, China's response to COVID-19 in major cities like Shanghai has highlighted the country's failure to manage pets and provide them with the necessary care, particularly during natural crises, pandemics, and other unforeseen circumstances.

Animals, Emergency Response and Management, and COVID-19 in China

Companion animals are often excluded from emergency plans in urban areas worldwide (Kapucu 2012). This is due to limited or unattainable disaster relief policies that do not account for pets. As a result, studies have focused on examining the changes in human-animal relationships during disasters and how emergency management procedures are developed and implemented, including the evacuation and rescue of pets (Chadwin 2017). However, the shortage of evacuation options and safe places to stay make it challenging, if not impossible, for many pet owners to evacuate with their pets during disasters (ibid.). The safety of pets themselves during natural disasters like fires, floods, and hurricanes has also been studied (see Glassey 2018; DeYoung and Farmer 2021). Neglecting companion animals during national emergencies can have significant consequences, including people refusing to evacuate or be rescued out of fear for their pet's well-being (Day 2017), as well as post-traumatic stress disorder and psychological trauma due to forced separation (Brackenridge et al. 2012; DeYoung and Farmer 2021). As such, disaster-specific pet emergency plans may improve urban resilience and public health worldwide (Chadwin 2017).

The close relationship between humans and their pets has led many Western countries to include pets in urban emergency management plans. For example, the 2006 US Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS) was implemented after Hurricane Katrina. PETS aims to ensure that pet and service animal owners are taken care of during disasters by establishing a framework for emergency preparation at the national and local levels (Glassey 2018; DeYoung and Farmer 2021). PETS mandates that jurisdictions requesting federal funding under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act consider the needs of pet and service animal owners in the event of a disaster or

emergency (DeYoung and Farmer 2021). However, DeYoung and Farmer (2021) argue that the PETS Act has not had a significant impact, as local governments may simply include in their disaster management plans that pet owners are responsible for their own pets during disasters, which contradicts the spirit of the legislation. Additionally, PETS does not require hotels or shelters to accept evacuated pets, does not address pre- and post-disaster preparedness and resources needed for pets and pet owners, and does not consider disasters that give less time to prepare for pet evacuation, such as earthquakes. Therefore, DeYoung and Farmer (2021) suggest that the PETS legislation should be expanded to cover pets in more detail during the preparation of emergency plans.

"The Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China (ERL)" (2007) was enacted in response to the SARS outbreak in 2003, and covers emergency planning, natural disasters, technological accidents, public sanitation issues, social security concerns, and recovery and reconstruction activities (Data Base of Laws and Regulation 2007). The law marked the beginning of a comprehensive strategy for disaster management in China, which included the establishment of an emergency management system with a hierarchical bureaucracy that prioritizes central government control (Hu et al. 2021, 2). However, the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 exposed issues in the system's coordination between different regions and levels of government, as well as its ability to facilitate military involvement (ibid.). To address these shortcomings, reforms were implemented to improve coordination between local emergency management and other levels of government, including increased military and social participation in disaster prevention, response, logistics, and recovery (ibid.).

The rapid and effective public-health emergency response to COVID-19 in China was informed by the lessons learned from the SARS outbreak in 2003, and included timely pathogen identification and government policymaking, as exemplified by China's zero-COVID policy (Zhu et al. 2021). This policy has entailed strict domestic measures, such as border closures, continuous mass-testing, and intermittent lockdowns since the outset of the pandemic, although it has not been without controversy and backlash (Davidson and Yu 2022). At the heart of China's zero-COVID approach is the principle that "people's lives are of utmost importance", which has guided both national and local emergency responses to the pandemic (Yuan 2022). However, China's emergency response to the pandemic did not include measures for the care of pets, particularly in the context of urban public health emergency management. This omission is linked to China's historical biopolitical governance of animals and humans, which we will discuss in the following section.

Theoretical Framework

Biopower and the Biopolitical Governance of Animals (and Humans) in China

The official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC) stated on July 15th, 2022, in response to the country's strict zero-COVID policy, that the Communist Party of China (CPC) has always prioritized people's well-being throughout its history, and that Chinese Communists are willing to sacrifice everything, including their lives, for the interests of the people (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022). President Xi Jinping further stated that safety and health are prerequisites for human development and progress (Xi Jinping in Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022). Clearly, China's pandemic response prioritized biopower for the management of human life above all else. However, this approach failed to include the care of pets, particularly in urban public health emergency management, which is closely linked to China's historical biopolitical governance of animals (and humans), as we will now proceed to outline.

The term biopower, coined by Michel Foucault (2007), refers to a modern power technique that treats biological life and the population as objects. According to Foucault, biopower encompasses "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power" (Foucault 2007, 1). State control and political strategy, as argued by Foucault, constitute the security apparatus that decides who lives and who doesn't, in order to foster and improve life. The security apparatus is defined by Foucault as "those institutions and practices concerned to defend, maintain and secure a national population and those that secure the economic, demographic and social processes that are found to exist within that population" (in Dean 2009, 20). Thus, the state acquires regulatory authority over all forms of life, including the human species. The mechanisms, technologies, and techniques of biopower used to control the population (security mechanisms) constitute what Foucault calls biopolitics. Modern biopolitics does not deal with human beings as individuals but with humans as multiple bodies and the population as a whole (that is, as a species).

In Foucault's view, racism is a biopolitical form that is used to control the population. This is based on his argument about biopower and the contrast he draws between a life worth living and death. While Foucault emphasizes the "human species" in his definition of biopower, several scholars have extended the scope of this concept to include animal bodies, as noted by Vint (2010) and Srinivasan (2013). Jacques Derrida (2008) points out that philosophers such as Descartes, Heidegger, and Lacan fail to make a clear distinction between humans and animals, and challenges the binary between them by arguing that animals possess characteristics

that define humanity. Giorgio Agamben (2004) further complicates the distinction between humans and animals by highlighting the risk of exclusion from the human world. According to Agamben (2004, 26–27), the "state of exception" lies in the contrast between human and animal, human and inhuman, which is based on language or rationality, termed "the anthropological machine", and serves as the conceptual basis for the production of humanity's foundational inclusion and exclusion that produces "bare life". This "bare life" is neither human nor animal, but rather a basic form of life that exists only within the "state of exception". The creation of a biopolitical entity may therefore be seen as the earliest example of sovereign power in action, as it involves the regulation and control of life itself.

The concept of totalitarianism is closely related to modern biopolitics, as argued by Agamben (2004). Hannah Ardent (1976) also contends that totalitarian regimes of the 20th century epitomize biopolitical expressions of totalitarian rule. She suggests that the annihilation of people's uniqueness and identity results in their transformation into human animals, devoid of individuality and difference, whose freedom is only defined by species preservation. This transformation, as well as the dehumanization and metamorphosis that come with it, becomes the central issue in biopolitical expressions of totalitarian rule.

Foucault's concept of biopower is closely related to the previous discussions that view the distinction between humans and animals not just as a way of understanding knowledge, but also as a set of practices and discourses that have moral and political implications. In China, efforts to create a better human model by eliminating animalistic characteristics and defining a pure socialist state by excluding bestialized and dehumanized class foes from the country, both internally and externally, are not new.

One of China's earliest forms of biopolitical animal governance was the Patriotic Nationalist Health Campaign (*aiguo weisheng yundong* 爱国卫生运动) in the 1950s. In response to perceived US germ warfare, the campaign aimed to improve sanitation and hygiene, mobilizing people to kill insects believed to spread diseases. Rogaski (2002; 2004) argues that this program was a form of warfare against germs in Northern China's cities, which enabled the CCP to portray itself as possessing cutting-edge scientific knowledge. This campaign was part of a broader effort to promote nationalism, encourage broad participation, and eliminate adversaries.

Similarly, the Four Pests Campaign (*chu si hai* 除四害) was a large-scale biopolitical regulation of animals that was initiated to protect grain and promote modern health concepts. This campaign targeted rats, flies, mosquitoes, and sparrows. Both campaigns were connected by a common theme: the promotion of nationalism and the elimination of adversaries, which resulted in animals disappearing from both the habitat and consciousness of the Chinese people in the name of modernity.

Mao Zedong's war against nature and various species used slogans like "Cut Off the Tails" (*ge wei ba* 割尾巴) and "Man Must Conquer Nature" (*ren ding sheng tian* 人定胜天) (see Lippit 2008). The concept of the Socialist New Man in China drew a line between apes and humans and between capitalism and socialism, which prioritized the latter. During the Maoist era, humans (as a species) needed to be tamed to shed their animalized tendencies before the socialist human model (socialist modernity) could be created.

Since China's rapid economic development from the 1970s onwards, biopolitical governance of animals has continued. Habitat destruction and the loss of important ecosystems, including wetlands, forests, and grasslands, have resulted in the decline of many species and the loss of important habitats and resources. Despite efforts to conserve biodiversity, many species in China are still being over-exploited for food, medicine, and other purposes, leading to the decline of some animals and the loss of important genetic and ecological resources (Zheng and Cao 2015).

Historically, culling animals has also been used to prevent disease spread in the belief that it restores balance and protects humans (Lu 2021). The aim of this approach is to prevent diseases from spreading from animals to humans, safeguard public health, and maintain social stability. The Chinese government has implemented animal quarantine measures, including movement restrictions and the destruction of infected animals, established surveillance systems to monitor animal health, and controlled the sale and transportation of animal products (Zhang 2019). For instance, during the 2002–2003 SARS outbreak, China implemented measures such as culling civet cats (which were believed to be the natural reservoir of the SARS virus) and closing wildlife markets, as part of a larger effort to control the spread of the disease and prevent a wider epidemic (ibid.). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, China once again employed biopolitical strategies to manage animal populations, such as suspending the trade and consumption of wild animals and implementing strict regulations on the movement of animals (Koh 2021). Although incidents of pet killings appear to be isolated events conducted by health workers and not officially sanctioned by the Chinese government, they do demonstrate the impact that China's historical biopolitical approach to animals had on the treatment of pets during the pandemic. Overall, China's historical approach to the biopolitical management of animals during infectious outbreaks has been characterized by a combination of traditional beliefs and modern scientific methods, shaped by cultural and economic considerations, as well as by the need to prevent the spread of disease and protect public health.

Our article explores the impact of biopolitical mechanisms on animals and humans under China's zero-COVID policy, and critiques the absence of emergency

management measures that include pets during emerging infectious diseases. To achieve this, we investigate the motivations and behaviours of animal advocates on Weibo, as well as the role of social media in promoting collective action and social change. Our goal is to enhance the understanding of social media's potential in promoting animal welfare advocacy in China, particularly during periods of national crises when resources for protecting animals are scarce or unavailable.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Since the 1940s, the uses and gratification theory has stood out from other effect models of media research that emphasize the powerful influence of the media on its audience, such as the hypodermic needle model or agenda setting. This framework proposes that media users are active participants (Liu 2015). The pioneer of the theory, Katz (1959), suggests a shift from asking "what do the media do to people?" to "what do people do with the media?" This approach recognizes that viewers are active agents who make conscious choices about the media they consume, based on their personal identity, information-seeking and social interaction needs, as well as their need for entertainment (Blumler and Katz 1974).

Taking this into consideration, Blumler's (1979) concept of an active audience highlights the purpose and utility of the media (utility), the audience's cautious choices (intentionality), and how they selectively appropriate media in ways that align with their interests, values, and goals (selectivity), as well as how audiences can reject media impacts (imperviousness). Lin (1999) suggests in uses and gratification theory that users engage with media not only to fulfil specific psychological or social needs, such as social interaction or escapism, but also to search for emotional gratification (psychological and environmental), which can concurrently happen during their exposure to media.

Uses and gratification theory also implies that users have self-awareness when choosing a media outlet (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1974), particularly in a new media ecology where old and new communication channels compete with each other. Therefore, since the emergence of online communities, the characteristics of uses and gratification have also been studied in other fields of communication research, such as computer-mediated communication and social media (Lee and Ma 2012).

Digital uses and gratification have also been studied in the context of social media, highlighting the significance of the time spent and information-sharing on these platforms, as well as the use of social media for self-expression, social satisfaction and affection, and inspiration (Quan-Haase and Young 2010; Krause, North, and

Heritage 2014). However, Hsu et al. (2015) caution that uses and gratification theory is not universally applicable and that specific settings and cultural backgrounds need to be taken into account when applying it to social media. Furthermore, recent research has focused on the uses and gratification theory in new content-generating sites, where users employ these new technologies with ideological motivations (Kaye 2010). This has led to the emergence of virtual communities that are active in cross-examining traditional media, engaging in debates with like-minded individuals, and mobilizing sentiments to shape public opinion and influence political decision-making.

In our study, we aim to investigate how Weibo users engaged in discussions surrounding animal welfare on Chinese social media during a significant moment in Chinese historical biopolitical governance, and thus understand the role that social media played in mobilizing animal advocates to take an active and prominent part in the emergency management of pets during the COVID-19 pandemic. By exploring the motivations and behaviours of animal advocates in the online space, we aim to shed light on how social media can serve as a platform for fulfilling individuals' needs for social connection and self-expression within the broader animal rights community. Through our research, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which social media can be leveraged to promote social change and support collective action in the realm of animal welfare advocacy in China, particularly during public health emergencies.

Methods and Materials

Quantitative Content Analysis

Quantitative content analysis involves creating and using predetermined categories to count and quantify media messages (Manganello and Blake 2010). In this study, we employed word cloud analysis to examine the most frequently used keywords in both media posts and user comments on Weibo related to the focal corgi killing. This method allowed us to visualize the most prominent topics and keywords in a large number of social media texts (Hubert et al. 2020). By analysing related posts and public discussions of the event, we aimed to investigate the focus of the discussions.

The collection of sample data in the study was divided into two stages, which produced two subsample groups for word cloud analysis (see Figure 1). In the first stage, we gathered Weibo posts that were focused on the media reportage of the dog killing event in Shanghai. We primarily conducted a pilot data collection

and identified that the majority of Weibo posts discussing the dog killing event were published between the 6th to 12th of April 2022. Therefore, based on this timeframe, we used the Weibo search engine and collected all of the 7,077 Weibo posts from the search result of the Chinese keyword "*Shanghai Keji*" 上海柯基, Shanghai Corgi). These posts either contained the Chinese keywords "Shanghai" (上海) and "*Keji*" (柯基, Corgi) simultaneously, or were identified to be relevant to the event of "*Shanghai Keji*" (Shanghai Corgi) by the Weibo search algorithms. In the second stage, with the intention to analyse the public response to the event, we further collected 1,333 accessible user comments under five chosen Weibo posts published by different news organization that reported the event with the same content, which constitute subsample B. The clarification of the data source can be found in Table 1. Finally, the texts in two subsample groups were processed to generate two word cloud visualizations. After the data cleaning process that combined duplicate keywords, two visualization figures were finalized. Both data collection and the word cloud visualization were performed in Python. It is important to note here that widespread news of the killing of this dog event appeared exclusively on the Weibo platform, according to our extensive internet search at the time.

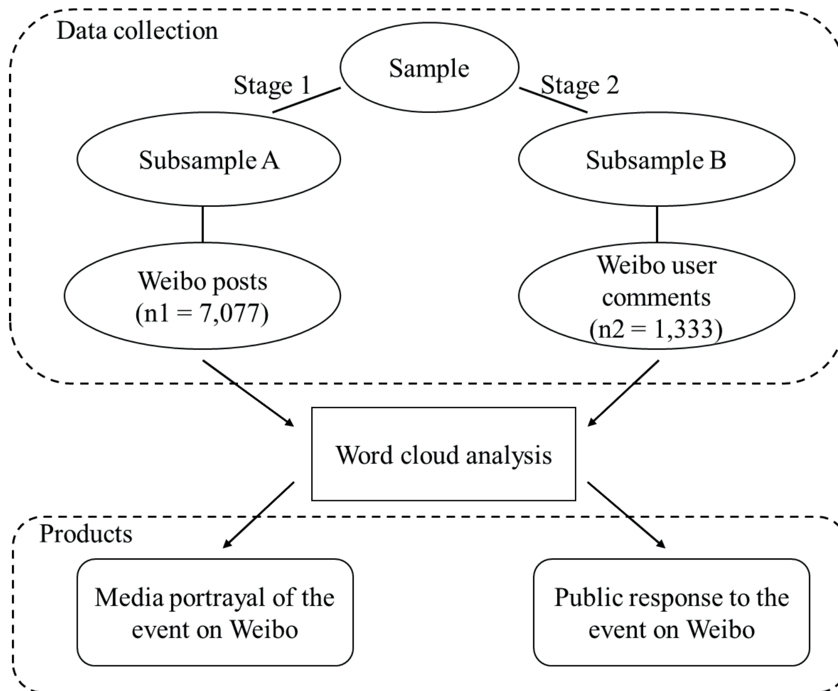

Figure 1: Quantitative analysis procedure. (Source: Authors)

Table 1: The data sources of Weibo posts in subsample B. (Source: Authors)

Authors of the 5 Weibo Posts	Accessible comments	Link
NetEase News (网易新闻客户端)	348	https://weibo.com/1974808274/Lnf47lxtI
Xinjiepai News (生活报)	93	https://weibo.com/1898885525/LnkwZ9wXz?refer_flag=1001030103_&type=comment
China Newsweek (中国新闻周刊)	263	https://weibo.com/1642512402/LnjbguniE?rfer_flag=1001030103_&type=comment
Anhui IFeng (凤凰网安徽)	386	https://weibo.com/5119282557/LnmzSnzLV?filter=hot&root_comment_id=0&type=comment
Xiake Island (侠客岛)	243	https://weibo.com/5476386628/Lnja7AlyV
Total	1333	

Qualitative Content Analysis

According to White and Marsh, qualitative and quantitative content analysis researchers sample text to choose relevant text for their purpose, but qualitative researchers focus on the uniqueness of the text and are aware of the multiple interpretations that can arise from close perusal of it (White and Marsh 2006, 36). Altheide suggests that qualitative content analysis enables researchers "to capture the meanings, emphasis, and themes of messages and to understand the organization and process of how they are presented" (Altheide 1996, 33). The meanings and interpretations are then analysed and interpreted in relation to the context in which they are produced (Bryman 2004). To comprehensively explore the uses and gratifications of media messages pertaining to the corgi killing incident, it was necessary to supplement quantitative analysis of word frequencies with a qualitative content analysis. This approach enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of how these messages were perceived by the public and how they served to satisfy their social needs. We identified two prominent social needs: the space for social media users to voice their concerns regarding China's biopolitical stance on pet

emergency management during the pandemic, and the utilization of social media platforms to mobilize like-minded animal welfare advocates to enhance pet emergency management efforts. These nuanced expressions and attributes of the content would have eluded detection by means of purely quantitative analysis, hence underlining the value of this qualitative approach. To execute the qualitative analysis, we curated media posts and user comments that exhibited a high degree of congruity with the identified quantitative keywords. Through this targeted approach, we gathered a diverse yet representative sample of content that effectively captured the spectrum of user sentiments and opinions concerning the corgi killing incident.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Results

Keyword	Frequency
pet	3,136
owner	2,608
quarantine	2,207
pandemic	1,831
killing	1,669
side of the road	1,458
neighbourhood	1,233
life	991
neighbourhood committee	794
positive	783
animal	762
response	756
epidemic prevention	561
Shenzhen	557
staff	546
victim	534
compensation	524
management	487
cruel	429

Figure 2: Word cloud of media posts on Weibo. (Source: Authors)

Keyword	Frequency
pet	177
killed	171
compensation	131
owner	113
life	110
animal	88
pandemic	84
positive	52
cruelty	52
epidemic prevention	48
neighbourhood committee	47
human	47
thoughtless	43
quarantine	43
virus	43
cruel	35
Shenzhen	34
management	30
welfare	30

Figure 3: Word cloud of user comments on Weibo. (Source: Authors)

The connection between our interpretations of the quantitative data and the qualitative content of Weibo posts and comments is noteworthy and elaborated in the qualitative discussion section below. Figures 2 and 3 show the word clouds generated from the Weibo posts related to the media reports about the corgi killing event in Shanghai and user comments, respectively. In these word clouds, the larger the keyword, the more frequently it occurs. To elucidate the most common terms used in the Weibo discussion, we have translated and attached the twenty keywords with the highest frequencies to the figures.

In Figure 2, we observe that words such as "pet", "owner", "quarantine", "pandemic", "killing", "cruel", "victim", "side of the road", and "neighbourhood committee" were frequently used in the Weibo posts, reflecting the media reports on the dog killing event in Shanghai. This suggests that these keywords attracted significant attention from the media, leading to discussions on the pandemic outbreak and the killing of a quarantined owner's dog in a cruel manner on the roadside in Shanghai. The act of killing the dog and

the subsequent response from the local neighbourhood community regarding the controversy were also widely mentioned. Keywords such as "epidemic prevention", "management", "staff", and "virus" were also frequently used, indicating the importance of epidemic prevention and management strategies and the role of health workers in relation to the media portrayal of the tragic corgi killing. Additionally, "response" and "compensation" were also emphasized, highlighting the attention given to the response by the Shanghai local authorities.

In Figure 3, the word "compensation" was one of the top three salient keywords mentioned, indicating that many Weibo users were discussing the compensation provided by the Shanghai local authorities as a response to the corgi killing. Furthermore, in the user comments, the words "cruel" and "thoughtless" were often used, which were also present in the original post that depicted the event as a "thoughtless act" (NetEase News 2022). This suggests that a significant number of social media users were dissatisfied with the health worker's treatment of the pet. Additionally, user comments often included the word "human" in their response to the health worker's treatment of the dog, indicating that their discussions focused on the situation of pets in the government's humans-first response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The similarities between both word clouds are noteworthy, as "pet" is the most prominent term in both figures, indicating that the public perceived the pet as the most crucial subject in the event. Furthermore, special attention was also paid to the legitimacy of killing the dog as a result of China's epidemic prevention and management measures for positive COVID-19 cases, as both word clouds contain terms such as "positive", "epidemic prevention", "management", and "quarantine". Therefore, it can be inferred that the killing had triggered the public to be more aware of issues relating to pets during the COVID-19 pandemic, including emergency management, animal welfare, and pet ownership.

Moreover, it is important to note that the term "Shenzhen" was also frequently mentioned in both Weibo posts and comments. During the pandemic outbreak in Shenzhen, a pet care centre was established for pet owners who were in quarantine by local authorities, which won a lot of approval from the public (Shenzhen Daily 2022). By comparing the positive pet management practices that other cities had adopted during the COVID-19 outbreak, the public was further aware of the existing problems in the emergency management of pets in Shanghai, emphasizing their disappointment with local authorities.

Qualitative Discussion

In what follows, Weibo user comments are further qualitatively analysed and thematically structured in response to the five chosen Weibo media posts below published by different news organizations that reported the event with largely the same content. Two themes were identified: China's biopolitical approach to the emergency management of pets during the pandemic, and social media's role in mobilizing animal advocates in the emergency management of pets.

China's Biopolitical Approach to the Emergency Management of Pets during the Pandemic

Posts-1, 2 and 3 (NetEase News, Xiake Island and China Newsweek):

> 4月6日，上海浦东。网友爆料疑似一位养柯基犬的主人一家三口被带走隔离，因家中无狗粮且无人，抱给居委会无法接收且拒绝重新带回家。主人思考过后放生，不料放生后被工作人员拿铁锹拍几下后一动不动，最后疑似拿塑料袋拎走处理。拍摄者录视频时说”太残忍了”。#居委会回应柯基被拖路边处理#：考虑不周，会给予主人赔偿.
>
> On April 6, a corgi dog was pulled to the side of the road in Pudong, Shanghai. Netizens revealed that a corgi owner's family was taken away to central quarantine facilities. Because there was no dog food and no one at home to take care of the dog, they took the dog to the neighbourhood committee. But the committee did not accept it and the owner could not take it back home. After careful consideration, the owner released the dog. But unexpectedly, after the release, a health worker beat the dog with a shovel several times, after which the dog died. Finally, it was suspected that the staff took away the animal in a plastic bag. "That's too cruel," the photographer who recorded this video said. # The neighbourhood committee responded to the Corgi being killed on roadside #: it was a thoughtless act and we will compensate the owner.

Post-4 (Xinjiepai News):

> 4月6日，上海，网曝浦东曹路某小区一只宠物柯基被工作人员拖到路边处理。#居委会回应柯基被拖路边处理#，工作人员称，因为这家有阳性病例，当时担心宠物狗会传染。当时确实考虑的不是非常周全，之后会和宠物狗主人进一步沟通，会给予对方赔偿.

> On April 6, Shanghai, netizens revealed that a corgi was dragged to the side of the road by a health worker in a community in Caolu, Pudong district. The neighbourhood committee responded to the corgi being pulled to the side of the road for disposal. According to a member of staff, because there were positive cases in the family, they were worried that the pet dog would infect them. At that time, their consideration was not very comprehensive, and they will further communicate with the pet dog owner and provide compensation.

Post-5 (Anhui IFeng):

> 4月6日，上海。浦东某小区因主人阳性，一柯基被拖到路边打死，柯基主人与涉事居委会均作出回应.
>
> April 6, Shanghai. In a community in Pudong, a corgi was dragged to the side of the road and killed because its owner tested positive for the coronavirus. Both the owner of the corgi and the neighbourhood committee involved have responded to the incident.

The sample Weibo posts mentioned above have been widely shared on the platform and provide a brief summary of the dog killing incident, including concerns that the dog may have spread COVID-19, the absence of protection for the corgi by the neighbourhood committee, the committee's response to compensate the dog's owner, and the shocked reaction of onlookers to the brutal act.

The Weibo posts give a glimpse of the corgi killing incident, and the following user comments provide additional insight into the public's reaction. The comments reflect the widespread anger towards the act of animal cruelty, as well as a concern for the lack of animal welfare laws. Additionally, the comments highlight the impact of China's biopolitical approach to managing pets during the COVID-19 outbreak, which prioritized human life over that of animals.

> 如果一定要让人类生命的价值凌驾于一切之上，那就应该明白你们口中高贵的人类要有保护小动物的责任，高贵的人类比一切生灵都更应该拥有人道主义，任何时候都要尊重所有的生命.
>
> If we value human life above everything else, we should understand that the so-called noble human should have the responsibility to protect animals. Human beings should adhere to humanitarianism more than all other creatures, and respect all life at any time. (User-1)

> 这不是第一次有宠物因为疫情而被杀死。上海柯基事件，我能理解大局为重，但说实话我很心痛.
>
> This is not the first time a pet has been killed because of COVID-19. As for the Shanghai corgi incident, I understand the need of putting the interest of the whole [humankind] above everything else, but to be honest, it hurts. (User-2)

> 令我愤怒的是，官方媒体发布了几篇关于疫情期间宠物可能传播新冠病毒给人类，并间接造成了人们的恐惧.
>
> It also angers me that state media has spread fear by releasing several reports about the possibility of animal to human infection during the COVID-19 pandemic. (User-3)

> 希望能够真正的完善动物保护法，虽然宠物可能会传染，但也希望能尽所能的好好对待，宠物也是一条生命!!!! 不要再让这样的事情发生了.
>
> I hope that the animal protection law can be truly improved. Although pets may be contagious, I also hope that we can do our best to treat them well. The life of pets also matters!!!! Don't let that happen again. (User-4)

> 最重要隔离管控，动态清零，与应急处置不去完善，对着无辜的动物喊打喊杀。难以置信这是国际大都市上海.
>
> The most important things, quarantine control policies, zero-COVID policy, and emergency management are not improved, while innocent animals are shouted at and killed. It is hard to believe that this is the so-called metropolitan city Shanghai. (User-5)

Overall, these comments provide insight into the intricate and multifaceted relationship between humans and animals, as well as the competing interests and values that came into play during the pandemic. They demonstrate how social media platforms enable individuals, especially animal advocates, to express their emotions, seek information, and engage in social interactions. These individuals utilize their comments to advocate for policy changes, increase awareness about animal rights, and express their frustrations and disappointments with the institutional response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on animals. The

comments highlight the dynamic and fluid nature of human-animal relations, which are shaped by cultural, political, and ecological factors. They reflect a range of perspectives on the value of life, from an anthropocentric perspective that prioritizes human interests to a biocentric perspective that recognizes the intrinsic value of all life forms. Additionally, the comments reveal scepticism and criticism of institutional narratives and a desire for accurate and transparent information. The authors question the accuracy and intent of state media in creating fear around animal-to-human transmission of COVID-19.

These comments underscore the complex and often conflicting attitudes towards animal protection, human health, and institutional narratives. They also emphasize the need for a balance between human and animal interests, with one user calling for the improvement of animal protection laws while acknowledging the potential risks of pet ownership. Furthermore, there is criticism of the prioritization of pandemic control measures over animal welfare, with disbelief expressed at the treatment of animals in a major city like Shanghai. As such, this case highlights the significance of a multidisciplinary approach to comprehending human-animal relations in China, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adopting such an approach can help bridge the gap between different perspectives and facilitate more sustainable and equitable forms of coexistence between humans and non-humans.

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and National People's Congress (NPC) have proposed the enactment of animal anti-cruelty and protection laws, which have received widespread public support. However, despite these proposals, such laws have not yet been approved (Sima and O'Sullivan 2016). The recent killing of a corgi in Shanghai considered in this article highlighted the urgent need for animal anti-cruelty and protection legislation in China. It also raised concerns about the lack of a standard operating procedure for the emergency management of pets, including their care and rescue during disasters. The negative discourse surrounding the killing of the dog in Shanghai was driven by the disappointment of Chinese netizens with the government's failure to care for pets due to the country's humanistic zero-COVID pandemic control policies. This failure also affected pets in other isolated instances during the pandemic (Yeung 2022; He 2022).

The political legitimacy of the CCP has primarily been used to enforce policing strategies for the protection of human populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ethical guidelines for animal protection in China are thus situated within a complex network of interlocking party relationships that involve the deployment of anthropocentric biopower, a phenomenon not unique to China (Cao and

White 2016). The creation of a human-animal divide during this recent health crisis is also not new in China, as evidenced by the Patriotic Nationalist Health Campaign and the Four Pest Campaign in the 1950s. Similarly, the pandemic has revealed the post-socialist state's governance of animals (and humans) through the biopolitical mechanism of Foucault's "apparatus of security". This is evident in China's emphasis on "human progress", "people's wellbeing", and "protecting people's lives", which are at the centre of its zero-COVID policies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC 2022). To expand on Foucault's theory but with the new Chinese post-socialist state in mind, the distribution of the human population on a large scale highlights the security apparatus through which the biological human is first subjected to governmental control and political strategy under the pretext of enabling and enhancing human life. In theory, the CCP has applied the Confucian humanistic concept of "governance" to its pandemic approach, but in doing so has failed to incorporate thousands of years of Daoist thought regarding the management of nature, society, and life to find a harmonious middle ground of reciprocity between humans and non-humans. As a result, China's COVID-19 disaster response efforts underscored the absence of an overarching "humanimal" emergency management system and legal framework to ensure that humans and animals are cared for equally.

The killing of the corgi due to COVID-19 prevention measures examined in this article exemplifies a dysfunctional bureaucratic negotiation structure between official humanistic power and animal welfare (or lack thereof) in China. This is a consequence of the biopolitical mechanism present in the strong anthropocentric discourses surrounding the zero-COVID measures at the official level. These include the recommendation from the Chinese CDC expert Dr. Li Lanjuan that pets should be separated from the human domain by remaining indoors and away from potentially contaminating conditions, as well as the state media's provocation of a pathological fear of pets by commenting on the possibilities of animal-to-human infection. Thus, we can see how the biopolitics of the Chinese state media during the pandemic also extended to the wider treatment of animals. This resulted in the Chinese government's failure to stipulate what happens to pets when owners who are classified as close contacts of positive cases are quarantined, or when owners with severe symptoms are hospitalized (Ho 2020).

In China, the AEPL has primarily focused on preventing, controlling, and eradicating animal epidemics for the sake of human interests such as economic security, public health, and safety, with little attention given to animal welfare (Pkulaw.com n.d.a). This approach has led to the establishment of formalized protocols for the prevention or killing of animals that can spread infectious diseases to humans, despite the fact that the LPTID does not reference or permit the killing of pets

during pandemic outbreaks (Pkulaw n.d.b). Scholars like Chadwin (2017) and DeYoung and Farmer (2021) argue that emergency management planning should go further to include pets, as this would strengthen communities during disasters, including public-health emergencies. This is particularly important in China, where the brutal killing of a corgi in Shanghai illustrated the dire consequences of failing to incorporate pets into an overarching emergency management framework during public-health crises. Instead of addressing the real issue of caring for pets during the COVID-19 crisis, in Shanghai the local authorities resorted to compensating the owners of pets who were killed, demonstrating their humanistic response through "infrastructural power" (Man in Chu 2014). However, the local authorities failed to listen to the voices of pet owners and ignored the wider concerns of the public. The compensation package offered by the Shanghai authorities highlighted the official anthropocentric biopower of China's political administration, which manages humans but fails to account for non-humans.

In conclusion, to ensure the welfare of pets and the interests of pet owners during public-health emergencies, the Chinese government must establish an overarching emergency management framework that includes pets. This would not only benefit non-human animals but also help alleviate the concerns of their human counterparts, whose mental health and safety are as important as their physical safety during disasters.

Social Media's Role in Mobilizing Animal Advocates in the Emergency Management of Pets

> 宠物主人请互相支持，如果您的宠物在隔离期间独自在家，请将您的姓名地址添加到以下数据库.
>
> Pet owners please support each other, add your name and address to the following database if your pet is alone at home while you're in quarantine. (User-6)

> 我知道上海有一个当地的宠物保姆服务中心务叫Spare Leash，该中心将在您隔离期间照顾你的宠物.
>
> I am aware that there is an animal sitting service centre called Spare Leash in Shanghai, the centre will look after your pets while you're in quarantine. (User-7)

大家自发组建了一个争取上海宠物方舱的群，里面理性讨论怎么给上海也像深圳一样申请一个宠物方舱，那时候深圳也是狗友争取来的，并不是主动给的，现在里面的律师请大家搜集签字的，请支持的朋友签名声援，谢谢！

We have taken the matter into our own hands and formed a group to fight for setting up a pet shelter in Shanghai, in which we will have a rational discussion about how to apply for a pet shelter in Shanghai like in the case of Shenzhen. The pet shelter in Shenzhen was also fought for by dog lovers, rather than the local authorities taking the initiative. Now the lawyers in the WeChat group are asking everyone to collect electronic signatures, and please sign your name if you support us, thank you! (User-8)

深圳为上海树立了一个很好的榜样，为主人被隔离的宠物设立了第一家宠物护理中心。 这得到了地方政府的资助。 我在成都也看到过这样的例子。

Shenzhen has set a good example for Shanghai to follow by setting up their first pet rescue centre for pets whose owners are in quarantine. This was supported by local government funding. I've also seen good examples of such things in Chengdu. (User-9)

有没有人看到上海一位和尚在疫情期间收养动物的新闻？

Did anyone see the news about the Buddhist monk in Shanghai adopting animals? (User-10)

我正在转发这个消息，有人以为他们在疫情期间收养了一只狗，但事实证明那是一只浣熊.

I am reposting this news of someone who thought they had adopted a dog during the pandemic, but it turns out it was a racoon. (User-11)

The comments presented in the case study highlight the diverse needs and gratifications that social media can fulfil for animal advocates in China during times of national crises, ranging from seeking advice on pet care during quarantine to seeking social support from the pet community. The transformative role of citizen journalism via social media tools and individual citizen content creators, leading ordinary citizens to seek social justice, has been discussed by Wall (2019), while

DeYoung and Farmer (2021) argue that social media can be helpful in crisis scenarios such as disaster planning, fostering animals, reuniting missing pets with their owners, and fundraising.

In response to the humans-first disaster response of the Chinese government during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media users took to their platforms to support affected pets and pet owners. This transpires in light of animal rights ethics, centring around the notion that animal lives have the same rights and intrinsic values as human lives (Cui and Xu 2019). This demonstrates the potential for social media to provide a sense of empowerment and agency, as users take action to organize and advocate for the animal cause. The case study illustrates the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the relationship between people and their pets during the pandemic, and the potential for social media to facilitate communication, organization, and advocacy towards more sustainable and equitable forms of coexistence between humans and non-humans.

The comments also highlight how social media can serve as a platform for information-sharing and mobilization towards a common goal, such as advocating for the creation of pet shelters in Shanghai. Weibo users encouraged people to contribute to a database circulating on social media, which took record of pet owner information, allowing pets to be taken care of while their owners were in quarantine. Other social media users urged people to contribute to the circulation of an application for a pet shelter in Shanghai. Shanghai residents also gathered together in their thousands to support Spare Leash, a local animal rescue service centre, to prevent mistreatment from occurring during the pandemic, such as the killing of the corgi (Hamer 2022). The active role of Chinese netizens on Weibo reinforced the transformation of communicative power from being "others" to being "actors" during times of epidemic uncertainty. This further demonstrates how social media influenced animal lovers to engage in sporadic animal activism where local and national authorities failed to take actions to make pet owners feel safer and protect their pets during the pandemic.

Chinese social media users have also lauded recent animal activism efforts among the public to protect pets during the COVID-19 pandemic. One such example is a Buddhist monk in Shanghai who has been rescuing stray dogs from the streets since 1994. During the pandemic, he had taken in nearly 8,000 dogs at his temple and shelter, along with a number of cats and birds (Landsverk 2021). Furthermore, news from Chinese state media emerged of a Shanghai resident who adopted a stray "puppy" during the pandemic, only to find out after two months that it was actually a raccoon dog, and the animal was then sent to the Shanghai Zoo for professional care (XinhuaNet 2022). Shanghai

pandemic control workers were also encouraged to follow the example of their counterparts in Chengdu, where they fed a cat whose owner was in quarantine (Ding and Guo 2021). Additionally, cases of COVID-19-related pet care were reposted for animals whose owners were sick and undergoing quarantine in other Chinese cities. For instance, local authorities in Shenzhen announced the opening of the city's first government-funded pet care centre aimed at protecting pets affected by the pandemic. The centre operated as a domestic animal sitting centre, facilitating the placement of pet caregivers with pet owners during periods of quarantine (Shenzhen Daily 2022).

These discussions on social media reflect the growing debate surrounding animal rights violations in contemporary China, particularly in light of the pandemic and the decision by some individuals to kill pets in the name of national security. The use of Weibo by animal-loving netizens during the pandemic demonstrates a form of social engineering that was influenced by animal rights actions offline. Activists argue that animals have intrinsic rights and value, and should be considered as subjects of a life (Regan 2004). Despite the lack of pet-specific disaster plans from either the national or provincial governments in China, public debates on animal ethics have raised officials' understanding of the importance of including animals in urban public health emergency management.

Some government officials in China have taken steps to rein in overzealous efforts to prevent the epidemic and educate the public on the importance of animal protection. In 2022, over 30 representatives submitted a draft pet law to the National People's Congress, aimed at promoting humane treatment and the reasonable regulation of pets (Diao 2022). During the peak of the pandemic, China's state-run media made a concerted effort to persuade the public not to leave or harm their pets. Similarly, management agencies in Xi'an were warned by the Public Security Bureau during the COVID-19 crisis to stop enforcing a ban on pet breeding, consider animals in their epidemic prevention strategies, and refrain from killing pets without reason. In 2022, a member of the National People's Congress encouraged people to take care of their pets instead of abandoning or mistreating them during the pandemic. Congress also discussed the societal issues caused by the widespread presence of pets and the lack of regulations regarding their treatment during pandemics (Yan 2022a).

Overall, the evidence suggests that the public's growing concern for animal welfare has the potential to influence Chinese policymakers to adopt a more ethical approach towards pets in the context of urban public health emergency management. Undoubtedly, social media has played a significant role in this development.

Final Thoughts and Possible Solutions

This article has discussed the significant role of Chinese social media in raising public awareness about the mistreatment of animals during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the lack of explicit policies and guidelines for pet care during disasters has contributed to negative public sentiment in this regard. Weibo has served as a platform for stimulating discussions on animal welfare, highlighting the anthropocentric approach of China's emergency management and disaster response, and prompting debates on the moral implications of prioritizing human safety and compensation over animal life. These discussions also challenge the biopolitical split between humans and animals that underpins the state's control over biological bodies, as well as the distinction between essential and expendable lives. Social media users have called for a disaster response that prioritizes the protection and rescue of animals, as seen in the Weibo discussions about pet care and rescue during the pandemic. The case of Shenzhen is a notable example of local authorities and residents coming together to save pets that may be left behind when their owners test positive for COVID-19. This article highlights the importance of social media in driving public discourse on animal welfare and promoting the development of more comprehensive and morally acceptable policies for pet care during disasters in China.

Overall, this research suggests that the Chinese government needs to take action to protect pets during emergency situations, such as natural and unnatural disasters, as highlighted by the instance of animal cruelty during the COVID-19 outbreak in Shanghai and other cities. To achieve this, several solutions can be considered. Firstly, China should introduce pets into its Emergency Response Law to provide statutory protection for pets and their owners during emergencies. Emergency managers and officials should facilitate a safe separation and return for pets and pet owners as soon as securely possible, to avoid distressing and cruel separations. This is known as the "do no harm" approach, as suggested by DeYoung and Farmer (2021). Secondly, communication between state media and pet owners should be improved by avoiding baseless claims about animal-to-human transmission during health emergencies like COVID-19, without official scientific evidence to back them up. This will help to reduce the potential separation of pets from their owners by health workers, which can cause trauma. Thirdly, China should continue to improve its unified system of emergency management, with increased community involvement to prevent the detrimental effects of pet-owner separation prior to disasters and better handling of pets during the recovery stages of national crises. Encouraging social media use among citizens, especially animal activists, can become a space to promote discussions on how to manage pets during national emergencies, particularly health

crises. In conclusion, it is important for the Chinese government to take note of the significance of animal welfare and the role of pets in emergency situations. The suggested solutions can help to protect pets and their owners during emergencies, and improve the overall system of emergency management in China.

We know that the connection between people and pets is strong, but China needs better policies to reflect this connection during times of national crisis, as this would help pet owners facing the potential separation or loss of their animals. The pandemic has sparked a meaningful conversation about animal rights between Chinese civil society and the state, prompted by social media demands. This conversation can lead to the development of future animal protection legislation with a focus on proper animal welfare in China, including the management of pets during national crises.

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Toward a Harmonic Relationship between Humans and Nature: A Humanist Reinterpretation of Early Confucian Philosophy

*Gloria LUQUE-MOYA**

Abstract

We are living in an era in which the world is being turned into an object to be exploited and nature into a storehouse. From environmental pollution and deforestation to toxic waste and the depletion of resources, the Earth is in trouble and we need to act. To address this environmental crisis, I propose to recover early Confucian philosophy because it can be used to develop a more desirable way of interacting with the environment. Confucian philosophy conceives a kind of humanism that promotes a harmonious relationship between people and nature. Thus, this article attempts to describe a distinctive attitude towards nature and the role of humans that we can find in early Confucianism as a way of rethinking our current ecological concerns.

Keywords: Cosmos, harmony, Confucius, *Dao*, *Tian*, *Tianxia*

Na poti k harmoničnemu odnosu med ljudmi in naravo: humanistična reinterpretacija zgodnje konfucijanske filozofije

Izvleček

Živimo v dobi, v kateri se svet spreminja v predmet, ki ga je treba izkoriščati, narava pa v skladišče. Od onesnaževanja okolja in krčenja gozdov do strupenih odpadkov in izčrpavanja virov – Zemlja je v težavah in zato moramo ukrepati. Za reševanje te okolijske krize predlagam obnovitev temeljnih paradigem zgodnje konfucijanske filozofije, saj jih je mogoče uporabiti za razvoj boljšega in bolj konstruktivnega načina interakcije z okoljem. Konfucijeva filozofija predstavlja vrsto humanizma, ki spodbuja harmoničen odnos med ljudmi in naravo. Zato poskuša ta članek opisati poseben odnos do narave in vloge človeka, ki ga lahko najdemo v zgodnjem konfucijanstvu, in s tem bralstvu ponuditi možnosti ponovnega razmisleka o naših sodobnih ekoloških problemih.

Ključne besede: kozmos, harmonija, Konfucij, *Dao*, *Tian*, *Tianxia*

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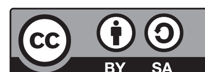

Introduction

We live in a time of environmental crisis. Most people know that nature is facing great challenges and degradation, but few know how to solve such issues. One of the main problems is the ideology that is characterized by an instrumental rationality, which threatens the very existence of all life on the planet. This mentality is inherited from the Enlightenment, which made humans not only the measure of all things, but "also the only source of power for economic well-being, political stability, and social development" (Tu 1998, 4).

This kind of ideology has two important aspects which are worthy of consideration. First, it turns the world into an object of domination, with serious consequences for the environment. As early as the 1960s, the Club of Rome warned of the consequences of indiscriminate and intensive use of nature. Ten years later, the United Nations called on all countries to sit down and discuss what it considered to be a sufficiently dangerous situation. Fifty years later, we are in the midst of a "planetary emergency". From deforestation and toxic waste to species extinction and pollution, the world is under constant attack. And this situation is aggravated by population growth, industrialization, urbanization, technological manipulation or military intervention.

The planet is in serious trouble because of our attitude to the environment. And although there is now a growing environmental awareness, we cannot afford to maintain an enlightened ideology that relies on technology to solve these problems. Today, it is believed that scientific and technological progress, as well as economic measures, will solve a problem that has a more complex basis. We therefore need to develop a broader philosophical understanding of ourselves as creatures of nature, not as owners.

Secondly, such a mentality presupposes inequality and discrimination. Many researchers and studies have shown that the Western model of development and progress cannot be exported to other countries. There is an unbalanced distribution of wealth and economic rents among people around the world. People in the West can own cars and houses, have ample leisure time and travel. But this is because there are economically poor and non-industrialized countries with high rates of poverty and economic instability. In other words, where people are born has a lasting impact on their lives.

From access to clean water and electricity to health care and education, there are people who do not have enough money to meet their basic needs. According to UNICEF reports and the World Health Organization (UN 2020), billions of people around the world suffer from poverty. The European model of modernization,

based on individualism, has divided the world's population into levels with different interests, functions and rights. Inequality is global and requires a new vision that offers equal opportunities and a new interpretation of distribution.

The challenges we face today therefore stem from a model of progress and development that reduces nature to an object of domination and exploitation. And not only nature, but also people born in less developed countries who do not have equal access to opportunities. These problems are easy to identify and have been well documented by academics and specialists. However, the solutions are more complex and cannot be reduced to technological, economic or political responses.

Today we need a new, non-discriminatory mentality that transcends the Enlightenment tradition. We need a new way of interacting that restores the balance between people and the planet. Confucianism has significant resources for rethinking our relationship with nature and discussing the role of human beings. We live in an interconnected world, and this school of thought can contribute to our current situation by offering a kind of humanism that promotes a new human attitude towards nature.

The aim of this paper is thus to explore the early Confucian tradition as a kind of humanism that presents a more desirable way of interacting with the Earth. This distinctive ecological attitude that we can find in Confucianism has already been researched by many scholars (see Cheng 1998; Ivanhoe 1998; Tucker 2001; 2020), but the current work attempts to show how this kind of humanism can contribute to the development of a different ideology for our present. I begin in the first section by arguing that Confucianism is not just an anthropocentric philosophy, but a kind of humanism that promotes a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. In the second part, I offer an analysis of three concepts, (*dao*, *tian* and *tianxia)*, which are crucial to this proposal in relation to our contemporary environmental problems. In the conclusion, I review the main lines of this paper and emphasize how this reinterpretation can contribute to our current world, a time of environmental crisis.

The Anthropocosmic Worldview of Confucian Humanism

Confucianism has generally been categorized as an anthropocentric philosophy, concerned only with human interests. As Peimin Ni has noted, there is a common assumption that the primary concern of Confucianism is morality (Ni 2021, 170). That is, the basic concern is the pursuit of human perfection (*ren* 仁). Nevertheless, this is a limited view of Confucianism, especially early Confucianism.

According to Confucius, human perfection can only be achieved by establishing a harmonious relationship with our surroundings. This is what we can read in the *Analects*: "Someone who does not understand the propensity of circumstances (*ming*) has no way of becoming an exemplary person (*junzi*). (不知命，無以為君子也。)" (Confucius 1999, 229).

Confucianism does not see a dichotomy between humans and the environment, but a correlative model that considers human beings as part of nature as a whole. As Tu Weiming has pointed out, what we find is not an anthropocentric view but an "anthropocosmic worldview": "Confucian humanism is fundamentally different from anthropocentrism because it professes the unity of man and heaven rather than the imposition of human will on nature" (Tu 1985, 75). That is, man and his environment are a microcosm set within the macrocosm of the universe. In contrast to European modernity, which develops a view of human rooted in individualism and domination over nature, the Confucian tradition emphasizes that man himself is included in the cosmos as an active participant (Rošker 2023, 3).

As Corey Walker has explained, the emergence of Western humanism in the modern era is related to the project of the Enlightenment as well as the global expansion of European powers (Walker 2019, 206). In other words, it is a product of the creation of a particular form of rationalist and secularist consciousness which seeks to transform and dominate the world. And the domain of reason and the project of rationality and science are supported by the conception of the genius of transcendental man. Therefore, this kind of humanism places human in the centre, "the primacy of the human—as ontologically and epistemically constituted within this discourse—remains uninterrogated" (ibid., 213).

Unlike modern humanism, the early Confucian tradition understood human beings as becomings. We are constantly interacting and developing with our surroundings in an endless process. For this reason, as Roger T. Ames has observed, human beings cannot be thought of as "something that we are, but something that we do" (Ames 2021, 172). Human beings, occupying a place on the same continuum as other living things (Nylan 2019, 1), interact with the conditions in which they live and create meaningful interactions with their surroundings.

Confucian humanism is not just a set of doctrines, but above all an "art of living". That is, it does not seek some essential reality, but attempts to cultivate harmonious relationships with one's surroundings. As Roger Ames and David Hall have argued, Confucius does not provide the basis for a "general theory of being" or a "universal science of principles" (Hall and Ames 1987, 248). In contrast, Confucianism presents "an aesthetic understanding", "an *ars contextualis*", in which there is a mutual interdependence of all things.

Early Confucian philosophy thus has an aesthetic orientation that emphasizes open-ended interaction. It stresses, according to Dascha Düring, “the importance of judging the cosmos and humanity’s role therein as things whose meaning and interrelations cannot be determined or fixed but must remain open for interpretation and reinterpretation” (Düring 2021, 143). In other words, it develops a genealogical view of the world in which there is neither an initial beginning nor an anticipated end, but a continuous process. This process of becoming can be defined in terms of three characteristics.

The first feature is organic holism. As Chenyang Li has pointed out, the Confucian approach does not consider the world as a single element, but as an infinite number of elements in continuous interaction (Li 2006, 589):

> Vast is the “great and originating (power)” indicated by Qian! All things owe to it their beginning: it contains all the meaning belonging to (the name) heaven. The clouds move and the rain is distributed; the various things appear in their developed forms. (The sages) grandly understand (the connection between) the end and the beginning, and how (the indications of) the six lines (in the hexagram) are accomplished, (each) in its season. (Accordingly) they mount (the carriage) drawn by those six dragons at the proper times, and drive through the sky. The method of *Qian* is to change and transform, so that everything obtains its correct nature as appointed (by the mind of Heaven); and (thereafter the conditions of) great harmony are preserved in union. The result is what is advantageous, and correct and firm. (The sage) appears aloft, high above all things, and the myriad states all enjoy repose.
>
> 大哉乾元，萬物資始，乃統天。雲行雨施，品物流形。大明始終，六位時成，時乘六龍以御天。乾道變化，各正性命，保合大和，乃利貞。首出庶物，萬國咸寧。 (*Yi Jing* 1:1)

Thus the Chinese tradition presents a view of nature as a cosmos, a process by which the universe is continually self-generating. Frederick W. Mote has claimed that there is no creation myth in the Chinese tradition (Mote 1971, 17–18). Tu Weiming, on the other hand, states that ancient Chinese thinkers were intensely interested in the creation of the world, but they did not accept that there was an external intelligence that created the universe (Tu 1989, 37).

The important point is that the Confucian tradition describes the world as an interdependent process in which different things are interconnected. As Jana Rošker has pointed out, there are no transcendental forms or immaterial realms, “a separate world of any kind of Heavenly Kingdom”, (Rošker 2021, 36), but a

"One-world view", in Li Zehou's words, which is the same for humans, gods and emperors (Li 1999a, 180). For this reason, this holistic interpretation is not concerned with establishing immutable principles, but with the transformations of the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物) (Zhao 2021, 53). Early Confucianism offers an interpretation of reality in which all elements, including human beings, are part of the same becoming process. Thus, Confucius says, "Zeng, my friend! My way (*dao*) is bound together with one continuous stand" (參乎！吾道一以貫之。) (Confucius 1998, 4:15).

This brings us to the second characteristic, dynamism. To understand the Confucian concept of the cosmos, we need to focus on the rhythm and cadence of change. Nature proceeds through comings and goings, beginnings and endings, and is involved in pervasive change. In short, this worldview is defined by the "growth and diminution of eventful relations among things" (Ames 2021, 172). Nature manifests itself in propensities (*shi* 势) to change. In this context, we need to understand propensity as the possibility of change. For this reason, this humanism is not concerned with defining the essences of things, but, as Tingyang Zhao says, "is geared toward grasping the transformations of the myriad things conveyed in comprehensive images (*xiang* 象)" (Zhao 2016, 53). As such, we can read in the *Analects*:

> The Master said, "I think I will leave off speaking."
> "If you do not speak," Zigong replied, "how will we your followers find the proper way?"
> The Master responded, "Does tian speak? And yet the four seasons turn and the myriad things are born and grow within it. Does *tian* speak?"
>
> 子曰：予欲無言。
> 子貢曰：子如不言，則小子何述焉？
> 子曰：天何言哉？四時行焉，百物生焉，天何言哉？(Confucius 1998, 17:19, 208)

Everything in nature is interdependent and interrelated in a dynamic and transformational process. This characteristic could be seen in the *Book of Changes*, as well as in the *Four Books*, and shows a contingent and open approach that focuses on becoming rather than on beings. Both humans and nature belong to each other in the continuum of the whole reality (Cheng 1998, 212), and this whole reality must be understood as a dynamic process of change and transformation:

> The way of the Earth is "not to claim the merit of achievement", but on behalf (of Heaven) to bring things to their proper issue. Through the changes and transformations produced by Heaven and Earth, plants and trees grow luxuriantly.
>
> 地 道无成」而代「有終」也。天地變化，草木蕃。(*Yi Jing* 2:12)

The third characteristic is harmony and aesthetic order. Confucius proposed an aesthetic understanding of cosmology. Rather than investigating the essence of things, Confucius presupposes a contextualization in which each element contributes to the generation of events. As Roger Ames has pointed out, early Confucian philosophers "sought to understand order as a participatory process requiring the artful coordination and disposition of things (Ames 2021, 176)." Thus we can read in the Great Appendix to the *Yi Jing*:

> It is Heaven and Earth that furnish models and patterns. It is time that changes and evolves. It is the sun and moon that are the most bright. It is wealth and nobility that are the most exalted. It is the sages that prepare things for practical use, and invent instruments for the benefit of the world. (*Yi Jing*, 373)

In contrast to rational order, which implies "pre-established patterns of relatedness" (Hall and Ames 1987, 134), Confucianism presents aesthetic order as a participatory process that requires the artful coordination and arrangement of things. That is, this kind of harmonization can be seen as "a relational and dynamic affair and can be defined as interactive and processive in nature." (Li 2021, 44).

The aesthetic order thus alludes to a generative and creative process in which the different elements of the cosmos, including humans, are involved. And these interactions resonate with each other:

> The Confucian notion of harmony is conceived of as a generative, creative, and (dare we say) "aesthetic" process in which the heterogeneous and diverse elements of the cosmos, including the human worlds—what are often referred to as "the myriad things" (*wanwu*)—are orchestrated into deep, harmonious relations that resonate with each other and entail productive tensions and resistance as well as agreement. (Li 2014, x)

Confucianism thus develops a kind of humanism in which humans belong to that creative process of self-fulfilment of reality. That is, the cosmology does not apply just to the arrangement and order of the physical universe, but to the social and historical worlds as well (Henderson 2010, 181). This kind of humanism does not

presume the dominance of man by intellectual authority, as modern humanism does, but the Confucian tradition provides a framework for harmonizing human life with the natural world (Tucker 2020, 109). In other words, it is not a human-centred humanism that focuses on human domination of the Earth, but a humanism that focuses on human beings as agents of self-transformation.

In contrast to modern humanism, which is based on a rational project that seeks to explain and control all changes in nature through rational discourse, early Confucian humanism assumes that reality is a creative change in which human beings participate. For this reason, Confucius says, "君子和而不同. An exemplary person seeks harmony not sameness" (Confucius 1998, 13:23). The art of contextualization, Hall and Ames assert, "involves the production of harmonious correlations of the myriad unique details (*wanwu* 萬物 or *wanyou* 萬有) that make up the world" (Hall and Ames 1998, 40). And this kind of interpretation can contribute to rethinking our current interaction with nature, as we will see in the next section.

The Harmonization with Nature: Rethinking Confucian Aesthetic Cosmology

As mentioned above, Confucianism develops a kind of humanism that calls for a harmonious relationship between man and nature. That is, this tradition is not limited to the human world, nor is it limited to human concerns. Every element in the world, animate and inanimate, is an integral part of the harmony that can be achieved. For this reason, human beings must live in balance with nature. And this interaction is not only ethical but also aesthetic, as it implies a creative creation in our everyday lives. As Li Zehou has explained, Confucian thinkers brought eternity and transcendence into the here and now and are concerned with anthropological becoming (Li 2010, 53).

Therefore, an aesthetic perspective does not necessarily imply a special significance for art and the artistic appreciation of nature. As Düring states, "there is something particular about the perspective that Confucianism advances in that its view in general exhibit a characteristic aesthetic tendency" (Düring 2021, 142). Confucian humanism marks a starting point in the transformation of nature through human participation. Due to the ongoing process of change, humanity must constantly find a way to achieve a dynamic harmonization with the environment. In this way, Li Zehou says, life's significance is "a historical becoming that cannot be achieved apart from a relationship to the collective" (Li 2010, 54).

We thus find an aesthetic ontology that is not concerned with substances or

attributes, but with the way in which harmonious interactions are developed. In contrast to the tradition that explores the essence of things or universal principles, Confucianism presents a dynamic theory in which every element contributes to the creation of every event or situation. As Thomé H. Fang has pointed out, the universe is "is an all comprehensive urge of life, and all pervading vital energy, not for a single moment ceasing to create and procreate and not in a single spot ceasing to overflow and interpenetrate" (Fang 1931, 111).

The cosmos is constantly changing, transforming, and becoming new, and humans must readapt their interactions in order to achieve equilibrium with it. As Li Zehou has stated, the tension for the Chinese is not between the sacred and the secular, the empirical and the rational, but "on what and how human nature should be" (Li 1999b, 142). In this way, early Confucian thinkers developed an aesthetic though that is concerned with application and the interaction between human beings and nature, which can contribute to develop other way of thinking our current relationships with nature.

To understand the significance of this kind of aesthetic cosmology, we need to look at Confucianism's own vocabulary. The main aim of this section is to analyse the assumptions that characterize this kind of cosmology, and then to consider the contribution of Confucian humanism to our current environmental crisis. Obviously, this interpretation does not provide all the answers to current problems and several objections can be made. However, the main ideas of this kind of ontology can help us to rethink our relationship with the environment from a different perspective.

Dao (道): *The Pace of the Whole Reality*

The notion of *dao* is a central concept in Confucian cosmology and is found many times in two different ways in the *Four Books*. Firstly, it refers to nature, understood as the whole universe, including everything in its course. Fung Youlan has stressed that the Daoist and Confucian schools introduce a theory of the *dao* inspired by the succession of the seasons, the movements of the sun and moon, which determined the life of the peasants (Fung 1948, 222). Similarly, the classic study by Archie J. Bahn introduces this Confucian notion of *dao* as a process, as the way of nature that "proceeds through comings and goings, beginnings and endings" (Bahn 1969, 18). *Dao* can therefore be defined as "world-making", a continuous process that never ends. In this sense, we can read in the *Analects*: "Ah, time's passage is like this running water, never ceasing either day or night" (逝者如斯夫！不舍昼夜。) (Confucius 1998, 9:17).

Nature is a never-ending process of succession, a constant renovation. We live in a world that is in a continuous process of transformation. And this process is ordered, not chaotic. In his famous work *Chinese Thought*, Marcel Granet describes it as a set of closely related ideas based on concepts of order, totality, responsibility and efficiency (Granet 1968, 179). However, we do not find a logical or rational order, but an aesthetic one, a balanced system in constant transformation. For this reason, Confucius says: "Reviewing the old as a means of realizing the new-such a person can be considered a teacher" (温故而知新，可以为师矣。) (Confucius 1998, 2:11).

In this way, early Confucian thinkers believe that the world is organized according to a certain principle, which they call *dao*. However, the term is also used in another sense, as a path or road. This meaning denotes a human way of living in the world, a human roadmap for interaction, and can be found through an etymological analysis. If we make a philological examination of the term, we can see that this character is composed of two basic parts: *chuo* (辵) "to go over" radical and *shou* (首) "head" phonetic. This combination alludes to "lead the way", as Roger Ames and David Hall have pointed out, denoting "the active project of road-making" (Hall and Ames 1987, 227). The basic meaning of this character therefore expresses the continuity between Heaven, humans and the Earth (天, 人, 地) as a trinity. It is the way of being that "achieves optimization in any modality" (Zhao 2021, 51).

This kind of approach has led us to reconnect people with the aesthetics of the world. The notion of *dao* is defined in an ontology of becoming, which deals with transformations, rather fixed essences. For this reason, this tradition reflects on "how it becomes" or "what is the way". In this sense, we can read in the *Analects*: "Exemplary persons (*junzi*) in making their way in the world are neither bent on nor against anything; rather, they go with what is appropriate (*yi*)" (君子之于天下也，无适也，无莫也，义之与比。) (Confucius 1998, 4:10). In contrast to the modern European tradition, where the aim of philosophy is knowledge and the aim of knowledge is to master nature, Confucianism tries to observe the rhythms of nature and develops patterns of interaction to consolidate a harmonious equilibrium.

This approach could contribute to our present situation, where the modern European view of nature and the overproduction of the capitalist system have led to an environmental crisis. Today, governments develop their policies following a paradigm of continuous development, according to which the economy must grow. But the Earth is finite and has its own rhythms and patterns, its own *dao*. We cannot sustain a system that imposes a dizzying pace of growth on nature.

In this way, the Confucian concept of *dao* can help us to develop a view of the whole of reality as a dynamic and creative process of change in which man and nature are included. The world of nature and the world of culture form a continuum, and therefore we cannot develop a view of nature as a mere object of domination and expansion of economic growth. The Confucian sage must glorify his life of virtue and fulfil his human existence in creative engagement with the world. And this approach can help us to foster renewed creativity and future development.

Dao, understood as a process and the whole of reality, is constantly changing, and human beings are part of this process. In contrast to the current approach based on overproduction and theories that are alien to nature and its rhythms, human creations should continue the natural course of nature.

Tian 天*: The Way of the Myriad Transformations of Nature*

The character *tian* has received considerable attention due to its importance in Chinese mythology, religion and philosophy. In Confucian thought, *tian* refers to the universe in relation to the Earth (*di* 地). Therefore, the Chinese word *tian* can be rendered as nature in which things are always relational and situational and should be seen as such (Li 1999, 21). This meaning is also suggested by an analysis of the Chinese character, which is composed of two basic elements: "the one" (*yi* 一) and "the great" (*da* 大). This combination suggests an adult human being and the sky above his head.

Nevertheless, some characters found in oracle bone scripts depict a large head on a tall person, which seems to suggest an ideograph of an anthropomorphic deity. We can therefore find two meanings of *tian*: a spiritual or religious understanding of Heaven as the Supreme Being, and a naturalistic understanding of Heaven as nature (Wong 2012, 69). What is important for our analysis here, however, is that although there is this anthropomorphic deity interpretation, for Confucian thought *tian* is not a principle that creates a world independent of itself. Rather, *tian* is "a general designation for the phenomenal world as it emerges of its own accord" (Hall and Ames 1987, 207).

In this way, *tian* expresses the way (天道) of the myriad transformations of nature. As Confucius says: "Does *tian* speak? And yet the four seasons turn and the myriad things are born and grow within it. Does *tian* speak?" (天何言哉？四時行焉，百物生焉，天何言哉？) (Confucius 1998, 17:19)

The myriad things are involved in an ongoing process of change that is unpredictable. For this reason, Confucian thought does not focus on existing things or

principles, but on "propensities (*shi* 势) latent in the transformations themselves" (Zhao 2021, 53). That is, Confucian thinkers believe that we live in a world that is contingent and open, and that human beings must make constant efforts to interpret natural transformations.

This interpretation can contribute to our current view of nature because it does not merely imply a general realm of living plants, inanimate objects and animals. This means that nature is not separate from man. Nowadays, we assume that our planet has undergone drastic changes due to rapid advances in technology and industry. In other words, we consider the human impact on the Earth and advocate for sustainable management of resources. However, we need to think not only about human activity on the environment, but also about our own view of nature. Nature is not just the phenomena of the physical world, it is a vast array of interconnected elements, so to meet the challenges of our world we need to seek a new humanism that does not place humans at the centre of the universe, but the harmonious interactions between man and nature.

The concept of *tian* could help us to provide a model of human interaction in which cultural and scientific activities must preserve the life of all nature. Our reflection on the environment must include the wisdom of the Earth in order to develop harmonious interactions. The present moment requires not only a critique of our patterns of behaviour and relationship with the environment, but also a new conception of nature that promotes the harmonization of things in a whole process.

With the advent of modern philosophy nature became a passive concept, an object of domination and exploitation. The development of the capitalist system has only aggravated this situation, breaking its own boundaries and producing beyond its own limits. This has led to crises ranging from pollution and deforestation to the collapse of ecosystems and the extinction of species. Nevertheless, the environment is not alien to the human species, defined as all the elements that surround us, whether living or inert, as well as their interrelationships.

As the United Nations has stressed, "our planet can only continue to sustain us if we protect its biodiversity" (UNDC 2021). Every form of life, every element of nature is interconnected and helps to hold our world together. For this reason, no matter what we consider, the alteration of any one element of nature can have disastrous consequences for ecosystems. The main problem is that modern and capitalist interpretations develop a kind of violation of nature, degrading each element to an object of domination.

What needs to be addressed is a recognition of nature in terms of interconnected

things in which each element has value. In this respect, Confucian humanism and its notion of *tian* can help us to develop a different way of interacting that is not focused on domination and technological development, but on harmonious interactions. As we can read in the *Book of Changes*:

> The great man is he who is in harmony, in his attributes, with Heaven and Earth; in his brightness, with the sun and moon; in his orderly procedure, with the four seasons; and in his relation to what is fortunate and what is calamitous, in harmony with the spirit-like operations (of Providence). He may precede Heaven, and Heaven will not act in opposition to him; he may follow Heaven, but will act (only) as Heaven at the time would do. If Heaven will not act in opposition to him, how much less will men! How much less will the spirit-like operation (of Providence)!
>
> 夫「大人」者、與天地合其德，與日月合其明，與四時合其序，與鬼神合其吉凶，先天而天弗違，後天而奉天時。天且弗違，而況於人乎？況於鬼神乎？ (*Yi Jing* 1:23)

Therefore, in Confucian philosophy, the content of the universe is not limited to the physical world, but also includes the human world. As Ivanhoe has demonstrated, Confucius believes that Heaven (*tian*) has a plan for human beings: "a just, peaceful, harmonious, and flourishing society" (Ivanhoe 2007, 213). In this way, human beings must transform the Way of Heaven into the great undertaking of the human way, as we will see in the next section.

Tianxia (天下): *Through a Cosmos Order*

Tianxia is an important Chinese concept that involves a vital relationship between people and *tian*. The Chinese characters used to represent this concept are composed of two characters, *tian* (天) and *xia* (下), and it can be literally translated as everything that exists under Heaven, or all under Heaven. That is, the term encompasses every element in the world and emphasizes a harmonious interdependence among the parts, as it alludes to a "cosmopolitical order" (Zhao 2021, vii).

This Confucian concept explains that man is not a caged spirit in a hostile environment, there are no enemies or opposites, we are not confronted with an external world to conquer. Rather, we are organisms of this dynamic process in which harmonious integration must be constantly achieved. As Jan Erik Christensen has pointed out, the root of wisdom is to be found in the value of life as an inner

connection between Heaven and human beings (Christensen 2014, 282). As we can read in the *Analects*:

> Exemplary people (*junzi*) in making their way in the world are neither bent on nor against anything; rather, they go with what is appropriate (*yi*).
>
> 君子之於天下也，無適也，無莫也，義之與比。 (Confucius 1999, 4:10)

We must realize that human civilization should be seen as part of the cosmos understood as a whole. In this sense, human life is part of the development of the cosmos, and we can only develop our full humanity in relationship with nature. However, nowadays we are disconnected from our environment and are imposing a dizzying pace on the world that is changing in even the most remote regions.

In this context, Confucian humanism, and in particular the notion of *tianxia*, contributes to thinking about our relationship with nature. Firstly, this notion can help us realize that we are just one species among others, but our actions can have catastrophic consequences for our environment. The United Nations department that supports China in integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into development decisions has highlighted that "our planet—the only home we have—is at breaking point" (UNDC 2021). They report that two-thirds of the Earth's oceans and three-quarters of its land have been damaged by humans. What is worse, by 2050 a million species could be at risk of extinction.

The whole ecological system exists in an interdependent relationship, so it is necessary to rethink other interpretations of our human development and to understand the proper role that all human beings play in the world. This leads us to the second contribution of this concept to our current situation.

Tianxia sees the cosmos as a human subject, not just a physical entity. Thus, the interpretation of the environmental crisis as a problem is not only manifested in the natural realm, but also refers to a social conflict. As a result of the socio-cultural organization, the normative system and the economic structure that societies have adopted since modern times, the environmental impact of human actions has created an unbalanced cosmos that endangers the life of Earth.

The key concept for understanding the Confucian notion of *tianxia* is the principle of harmony with nature. According to early Confucianism, human self-realization can only be achieved in harmony with nature. As we read in the *Zhongyong*:

> This notion of equilibrium and focus (*zhong*) is the great root of the world; harmony then is the advancing of the proper way (*dadao* 虘袂) in the world. When equilibrium and focus are sustained and harmony is fully realized, the heavens and earth maintain their proper places and all things flourish in the world."
>
> 中也者，天下之大本也；和也者，天下之达道也。致中和，天地位焉，万物育焉。(Hall and Ames 2000, 86)

Thus, as Evelyn Tucker has pointed out, "the great triad of Confucianism, namely, Heaven, Earth, and humans, signifies this understanding that humans can only attain their full humanity in relationship to both Heaven and Earth" (Tucker 2001, 131). Harmony is a key concept for understanding aesthetic cosmology. We live within the continuities of nature and yet are open to its spontaneity. For this reason, Confucius does not see *tianxia* as a transcendent principle to explain the natural world, but as a dynamic process in which human beings are constantly trying to restore a lost harmony. As Confucius says, "Achieving harmony is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety" (礼之用，和为贵) (Confucius 1998, 1:12).

In this way, humans must be open to the spontaneous production of novelty, to this cosmic creativity. David Hall and Roger Ames have defined this notion through the connotations of the character *cheng* (诚) found in Mencius' book and *Zhongyong*. In *Mengzi* we can read:

> There is a way of being creative in one's person. Persons who do not understand efficacy are not creative in their persons. For this reason, creativity is the way of *tian*, and reflecting on creativity is the proper way of becoming human.
>
> 诚身有道：不明乎善，不诚其身矣。是故诚者，天之道也；思诚者，人之道也。 (Mencius 2009, 4A:12)

Similarly, a passage in *Zhongyong* says: "creativity (*cheng* 誠) is the way of *tian* (天); creating is the proper way of becoming human" (Ames and Hall 2000, 104). Thus, this aesthetic cosmology explains the world through the notion of creativity which permeates all the elements of the world. Creativity is the key concept to define the way of nature and the way of becoming human, is the capacity to produce new and unique meanings and relationships in a particular event which promotes new orders. This point has a special significance today, an era that needs to find a different way of restoring a dynamic harmony with the environment and human beings. And although early Confucianism is not the solution to this, this school of thought shows how other kinds of humanism are possible.

Conclusions

In these pages I have explored the contributions of Confucian humanism to the world today. In contrast to modern Western humanism, early Confucianism develops a dynamic and holistic view of the world that can make significant contributions to our present. This article does not attempt to offer a solution to our environmental crisis based on early Confucianism, because our moment requires new responses created from our time. There are, however, a number of ways in which Confucian humanism can be helpful in rethinking our interaction with the environment.

First, unlike the dominant ideology of the Enlightenment, Confucian humanism does not offer a view of nature as a static entity composed of objects to be mastered. Rather, all forms of life are interconnected and play an important role in the universe. It thus promotes a different approach to our concept of nature, focusing on the Earth's magnificent biodiversity and the importance of all species working together to survive and maintain their ecosystems.

Secondly, Confucian humanism can contribute to the transformation of current attitudes towards the over-exploitation and degradation of nature. Confucianism never sees human beings as separate from nature, but as active participants in the transformative aspects of the cosmos. In this way, human development must be in harmony with the rhythms of Earth.

Third, Confucian humanism stresses the importance of creativity in the ongoing process of nature, but also in the ongoing interaction between humans and the environment. This point is particularly important because Confucian humanism develops an aesthetic ontology that emphasizes the dynamic aspect of creative becoming. And this notion appeals to the relationship between man and nature, but also between personal realization and the flourishing community.

Therefore, it is not only easy to find ecological ideas in Confucianism, but also a deep reflection on our role in an interconnected cosmos. And although Confucian thought cannot be adopted as a new humanism, its proposal offers new approaches to develop a desirable way of human interaction with all living things, promoting ways of respecting and valuing nature and the rest of humanity. We need to remove the ideology whose belief in progress, technology and economic development has led to environmental degradation and an unequal world. In this way, early Confucianism can offer new ways of rethinking our role in the cosmos.

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Why the Chinese Tradition Had No Concept of "Barbarian": The Mercurial Nature of the Human and Non-Human in Chinese Metaphysics

*XIANG Shuchen**

Abstract

This article argues that the concept of the "barbarian" is inapplicable to the Chinese tradition. By contrasting the Greek and later European view on what it means to be human with the image of the authentic human in Chinese philosophy, this paper argues that the Chinese tradition did not have a conception of what the Greeks understood as "barbarian". In the former, the ideal of the human is understood through an investigation of the concept of *ousia*, which is characterized by a dualistic hierarchy between "form" and "matter". The same dualism and hierarchy that distinguishes *ousia*, can be mapped onto the Greek distinction between the human and barbarian. Chinese metaphysics is not consistent with the Greek idea that reality is constituted by unchanging forms that are self-identical and keep within their own boundaries. Relatedly, the idea that there is a static hierarchy among the myriad things of the world is also foreign to Chinese metaphysics. Instead, the Chinese metaphysical tradition assumes that nothing will stay the same forever as all "things" are a function of how they relate to an ever-changing environment. One important consequence of this view is that the human and non-human distinction is much more dynamic. Related to this dynamic view of self is the (Confucian) view that the human being only becomes authentically human through their acculturation. This acculturation is the process of a person's growth through public symbolic media such as *li* (礼), *yue* (乐) and *wen* (文). This process of growth shapes the person into an other-regarding social being (*ren* 仁). Importantly, no one is born a fully-realized human; human-ness is not an essence that is possessed but is always a result of the process of acculturation.

Keywords: barbarian, culture, cultural anthropology, Confucianism, evolutionary biology, Chinese metaphysics

Zakaj kitajska tradicija ni imela pojma »barbar«: spremenljiva narava človeškega in nečloveškega v kitajski metafiziki

Izvleček

Teza članka je, da koncept »barbara« ni uporaben v kontekstu kitajske tradicije. S primerjavo grškega in poznejšega evropskega pogleda na to, kaj pomeni biti človek, s podobo

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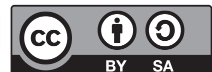

pristnega človeka v kitajski filozofiji članek dokazuje, da kitajska tradicija ni poznala koncepta »barbarskosti« v grškem smislu. V grški tradiciji je ideal človeka razumljen skozi raziskovanje pojma »*ousia*«, za katerega je značilna dualistična hierarhija med »obliko« in »materijo«. Isti dualizem in hierarhijo, značilna za pojem »*ousia*«, lahko prenesemo na njihovo razlikovanje med človekom in barbarom. Kitajska metafizika ni skladna z grško idejo, da resničnost tvorijo nespremenljive oblike, ki so samoidentične in se držijo svojih meja. Podobno je kitajski metafiziki tuja tudi zamisel, da med neštetimi stvarmi sveta obstaja statična hierarhija. Namesto tega kitajsko metafizično izročilo predpostavlja, da nič ne ostane za vedno enako, saj so vse »stvari« odvisne od tega, kako se povezujejo z nenehno spreminjajočim se okoljem. Ena od pomembnih posledic njihovega pogleda je, da je razlikovanje med človeškim in nečloveškim veliko bolj dinamično. Gre za (konfucijansko) stališče, da človeško bitje postane pristno človeško šele s svojo akulturacijo. Ta akulturacija je proces človekove rasti s pomočjo javnih simbolnih posrednikov, kot so *li* (礼), *yue* (乐) in *wen* (文). Ta proces rasti oblikuje osebo v družbeno bitje, ki upošteva druge (*ren*, 仁). Pomembno je, da se nihče ne rodi kot popolnoma uresničen človek. Človeškost ni bistvo, ki ga posedujemo, ampak je vedno rezultat procesa akulturacije.

Ključne besede: barbar, kultura, kulturna antropologija, konfucijanstvo, evolucijska biologija, kitajska metafizika

Introduction

This paper compares Greek and Chinese metaphysics and argues that the divergences between them effects how the two respective traditions understood the nature of the human. The understanding of the nature of the human, in turn, effects how the respective traditions understood what distinguishes the Greek from the non-Greek and the Chinese from the non-Chinese. It argues that the Greek understanding of the non-Greek—in terms of a "barbarian"—is so different from how the Chinese understood the non-Chinese that we can no longer, without qualification, use the term "barbarian" to describe Chinese views of non-Chinese.

In *Chinese Cosmopolitanism: The History and Philosophy of an Idea* (Xiang 2023a), I attempted to correct the pervasive practice of using (Western) terms such as "barbarian" and "race" to describe the historical Chinese relationship with the non-Chinese. My argument was that underlying terms such as "barbarian" and "race" is a particular metaphysical worldview that Chinese culture did not share. The absence of this worldview means that the actions of the historic Sinosphere was not shaped by ideological formations that lead to intentions or actions that accord with the rubric of racism. As I show in chapter two, racism has deep cultural roots in the Western tradition and can be traced to the Greek idea of the barbarian. The idea of the barbarian is in turn a function of Greek understanding about ontological order, the place of the human in cosmic order, and the nature

of the human. I understand racial ideology as a manifestation of other, more deep-seated psychological malaises and the worldviews that shape these. This article will thus focus on the Greek view of ontological order, the place of the human in cosmic order, and the nature of the human through an analysis of the concept of *ousia*. Clarity on this concept will in turn bring clarity to the Greek concept of the barbarian.

The concept of the barbarian only has meaning within this Greek philosophical context. Within the context of the Greek and the later Christian tradition that inherited these ideas, the barbarian is a species that resides between the animal and human. As a semi-human creature, the barbarian functions, in racialized cultures, as a *Doppelgänger* of what the human would become if it were to lose its humanity and be human only in shape. This very idea of the barbarian and the fear and revulsion of the barbarian and later racial other is indebted to two key characteristics of Western metaphysics. (1) A dualistic metaphysics that results in the law of the excluded middle. Under this binary, one is either human or one is not human, and if one is not human then one is either a barbarian or an animal.[1] (2) An ontologically static universe in which all difference is hierarchically ordered. This means that humans, being more rational, legitimately dominate the semi-human barbarians as the former are higher on this great chain of being than the latter. Given these metaphysical characteristics, the Western tradition has (predominantly) thought about the nature of the human as essential, innate and constant: the tradition has understood human nature in terms of the philosophical concept of substance or its earlier Greek variant, *ousia*.

The Chinese tradition differs in its understanding of metaphysical order and does not entertain such bivalent metaphysical dualisms. Consequently, it has a different understanding of what it is to be human. Below, I expand on my argument in *Chinese Cosmopolitanism* by showing how Chinese metaphysics influences how Confucian-Chinese philosophy understood the nature of the human. This tradition saw the human being as functionally incomplete without exposure to that which will complete her: culture. Culture is specifically the public, symbolic infrastructure created by the founding sages of the (Chinese) tradition which qualitatively transforms a person. Whilst we are all born biologically human, it is only the process of acculturation that allows us to become authentically human. Unlike lower animals, our biology does not determine our destiny. Our destiny lies both in our individual hands as well as the collective hands of humanity. Individually, an agent has a degree of freedom in choosing the culture(s) they engage with and, through

1 Please see my earlier work on how the idea of "animal" in the Chinese context differs from the idea of the animal in the Greco-Christian context due to the "processual holist" nature of Chinese metaphysics (Xiang 2021b).

their engagement, furthers both the individual capacity to achieve greater levels of freedom and the collective ability to maintain and create the space of culture. Collectively, humanity creates the culture in which and through which we are formed. Unlike the lower animals whose behaviors and reactions to their environment are almost wholly predetermined by their genetic makeup, a person's interaction with their environment is shaped to a constitutive extent by the socially created world of culture (language, art, technology and so forth).

This Confucian-Chinese conception of personhood differs from the dominant understanding of self in the Western tradition. In the latter tradition, the essence of humanity is something static that is predetermined prior to the arrival of the self in the world. The human does not differ from the lower animals in being predetermined by their genetic makeup. Indeed, it is precisely their genetic makeup or biological essence that distinguishes them from all other organisms in nature. It is for this reason that in the history of Western philosophy there is a visible obsession with defining and delimiting the essence that makes humans distinct from the rest of the natural world.[2] It is not the process of our acculturation that makes us human, but, instead, our humanity is reduced to an innate quality: a substance or essence. This conception of personhood is non-relational; what makes one human is an *a priori* quality that is static and constant regardless of the context in which it is placed. This quality ("human nature") is defined in itself and is conceived by itself (*quod in se est et per se concipitur*) and has a one-way causal efficacy (like the philosophical concept of an essence) in forming the human being. In contrast, the Confucian-Chinese conception of the self is a relational one: a self cannot be defined prior to the relationships it partake of and these relationships are mediated by the public symbolic system that is culture. It is due this understanding that the self is formed through socially constructed symbolic nexus that the Confucianism traditionally stressed the importance of *li* (礼), *yue* (乐) and *wen* (文). If the self is formed through culture, then it is vitally important that it is formed through cultures that predispose the self towards a public-mindedness that conduces to harmony with both the social other and the world. What is authentically human is activated through a person's relationship to the social and physical worlds (i.e. the social other and the physical environment) and the inter-relational symbolic system that mediates these.

2 In *Republic* 430 B, for example, Plato talks about the precarious form of true belief that can be found in the nature of animals and slaves (Plato 1997, 1062; Sorabji 1993, 11). The gradualism in Aristotle's biology is interrupted by introducing a sharp distinction between animal and man (Sorabji 1993, 13–14). For Aristotle, animals are without the definitive qualities of humans: reason (*logos*), reasoning (*logismos*), thought (*dianoia*), intellect (*nous*), and belief (*doxa*) (ibid., 14). Much of his treatise *On the Soul* is concerned with distinguishing between plant, animal, and human souls (ibid., 15). See Xiang (2023a, 98).

This paper will proceed as follows. It will first show the correlation between Greek metaphysics and its attendant conception of the human before examining the correlation between Chinese metaphysics and its attendant conception of the human.

The Ousiodic Conception of the Human: The Unconditioned Form

In *Metaphysics and Oppression: Heidegger's Challenge to Western Philosophy,* John McCumber describes the Greek concept of *ousia*. McCumber clarifies that it is related to "substance", "essence", "form", and "matter" (McCumber 1999, 21). McCumber argues that under the Aristotelian conception, for a thing to be an *ousia* it will be distinguished by the characteristics of "boundary", "disposition", and "initiative". By boundary is meant that the thing has definite spatial limits beyond which that thing no longer is. Various qualities inhere in *ousia* but *ousia* does not itself breach its own boundaries and become a part of something else. By disposition is meant that one aspect of the thing—and for Aristotle this is the thing's form or essence—generates its parts out of matter, orders them and everything else within these boundaries and maintains this order. All the properties of the thing exist because they inhere in its underlying nature. By initiative is meant that the thing affects the world beyond its boundaries through the movement of its form or essence beyond its boundaries (ibid., 14, 22, 25–26).

McCumber clarifies that "a being which sets a standard for itself is an *ousia*". An *ousia* exists according to itself in the sense that it doesn't merely exist (in the way that a heap of sand exists), but exists by virtue of being in accordance with itself or its own standard (which is itself) (ibid., 27). This standard that *ousia* sets for itself, non-accordance with which would mean that it is no longer *ousia*, is its essence. "Essence" as Aristotle writes in *Metaphysics* (VII.4) is "what [a thing] is said to be according to itself" (quoted in McCumber 1999, 29). Any property not belonging to the essence is relegated to derivative status or excluded as accidental (ibid., 44). When this essence moves beyond its own boundaries, for example, in human reproduction, then we can speak of "form". Form can be understood as the universal that particulars can participate in (in the case of humans, the particular "essence" of a species) (ibid., 33–34). Matter is that which submits to form. Matter exists in a negative dialectical relationship with form. Without form, matter is not anything at all and is defined negatively as outside the determination of being (ibid., 38). Whereas form is a unitary active principle that orders matter into the parts of a living body and maintains this order, matter is merely that which is acted upon. Take the example of a sapling that generates its leaves, branches and bark from other matter (the nutrients in the soil and carbon dioxide, for example).

The ousiodic form of the sapling generates a composite from other matter, orders and then maintains this form. This form, since it imparts unity, must itself be a unit. The ousiodic form of a thing is thus a unitary active principle which shapes the matter it encounters into the parts of a living body and maintains the correct functioning of these parts (ibid., 36–37). This form is the "active potency" of a thing to affect what is outside its boundaries (ibid., 42). In nature, when a form acts on matter, this form generates the boundaries of the matter and generates and orders the content of this matter (ibid., 41).

McCumber's account of the characteristics of *ousia* apply to how the Western tradition has overwhelmingly understood the nature of being human. What is most authentically human is an unconditioned, *a priori* principle that affects the material world but is itself unaffected that world. This principle cannot change, because if it changed it would no longer be itself. This conception of the human, I argue, is the basis for the obsession with a "universal human nature", that is, the idea that there are general aspects of human nature that transcend human groups. The thought goes that human "universals" are hereditary and genetically based behaviours (Sussman 1995, 5). It is also the basis for the historic (and continuing) Western obsession with genetic determinism, eugenics and racial determinism. The idea that human differences were permanently fixed in genes was historically the major rational for the eugenics movement (ibid., 2). Elsewhere (Xiang 2021c), I have shown how contemporary science, under the guise of genetics, is still obsessed with the idea of an unconditioned human nature, genetic predestination and with the idea that the characteristics of socially constructed "racial" groups have a basis in *ousia*.

The Barbarian: Dualism and Hierarchy

The above discussion on *ousia* will help to elucidate the Greek and later European conception of the human and the "barbarian". One of the defining characteristics of the Aristotelian conception of *ousia* is its ability to bring order to matter. Inherent in the concept of *ousia* is a dualism between essence/form and matter. The Greek conception of the barbarian, I argue, operates under this dualistic structure. Recall that McCumber characterized the form or essence of *ousia* as "initiative", that is, the active seeking of matter beyond its own boundaries to shape and maintain according to its own ordering. The Greek conception of the barbarian and its relationship to its master can be understood in terms of the dualism that is defining of the concept of *ousia*. For the Greek tradition, the barbarian is understood as matter without form, awaiting the form of the master so that it can be ordered.

In this regard, it is interesting that for Aristotle matter tends to reject its ordering by form. Matter has a tendency towards dissolution and an active principle, the "immanent form", is needed to keep this from happening. The idea that matter is to be disciplined by form and that matter is antithetical to form, not only in the sense that it is the absence of form but also that it actively tends towards the dissolution of form, will be revisited below in showing how these characteristics also apply to the Greek concept of the barbarian. First, I want to show that this dualistic structure that I have argued is inherent to the Aristotelian concept of *ousia* can also be seen in the Aristotelian account of causation. Once again, matter is set in a negative dialectical relationship with what can be construed as initiative.

Aristotle's four causes (material, formal, efficient and final) explain "causation"—causation here denoting motion, change, generation and destruction. Aristotle's conception of causation is dualistic. As he writes in the *Physics*, "The last three [formal, efficient and final causes] often coincide; 'for the what' and 'that for the sake of which' are one, while the primary source of motion is the same in species as these" (*Physics* 198a25-27). The material cause is thus seen as a category apart from the other causes, and is a mere *potentiality* which needs the three other causes to be made into an *actuality*. The separation of material cause from formal, efficient and final causes means that there is an implicit conception of (formless) matter as inert such that order is externally imposed. As G. E. R. Lloyd notes, the ubiquitous use of technological and craft imagery in Aristotle's cosmological doctrines point to "a distinction between the moving cause and the material upon which it acts"[3] (Lloyd 1966, 291). In sum, under the Aristotelian conception of causation, there is a dualistic conception of a substrate that is abstracted from its relationships (formal, efficient and final causes). This hypothetical substrate, a hypothetical thing that is devoid of relationships and order, is the dualistic opposite of order (formal, efficient and final causes). Causation is explained as the application of these three causes onto the material cause. The material cause or matter is mere potential that needs to be ordered by something external.

It follows from this dualism between order and matter described above that under the Aristotelian view of nature all motion in the world is set into motion by an unmoved mover (*Physics* 258b10-259a20). Nothing in the physical world moves of its own accord, as its movement must be caused by something external and necessary (*Physics* 258b30-33). Things that are more powerful are higher up in this hierarchy and move the lower (*Metaphysics* 1018b19- 1018b25). The view that a higher thing moves a lower thing in the physical world corresponds to the

3 The dualism that arises between the material and form can thus be attributed to the idea of intelligent design. The material itself is never self-organizing; the presence of organization *has* to be a sign of some agent who did the organizing/form-giving.

Aristotelian view that in the microcosm of the body, there are similar natural hierarchies where there is a ruler and a ruled (*Politics* 1254a28-30): the ruler being the soul, and the ruled being the body (*Politics* 1254a33-34). The soul is identified with the mind and the rational element, as well as the male, whereas the body is identified with desires and the female (*Politics* 1254a42-56). In the *Nichomachean Ethics,* the soul itself is described as dualistic, "one part [of the soul] has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to one, the other in the sense of possessing one and exercising thought" (*Eth. Nic.* 1.7 1098a3-5). There is a part of the soul "which is by nature opposed to reason, fights against it, and resists it" (*Eth. Nic.* 1102b16f). In spite of its antagonism to reason, it is able to recognize and obey reason (*Eth. Nic.* I.13 1101a3). Paralleling this hierarchical understanding of motion, in Aristotelian teleology the final cause of something is the perfection of that thing, the fulfilment of its existence and its inherent purpose. This means that "lower" species exist for the sake of "higher" ones (*Pol.* I.8, 1256a19-21) and all generated creatures are ranked in terms of "nobility" (*GA* II. I 732a24 – 733b23) in the *Scala Naturae.*

There are thus two ways to understand the nature of the barbarian and its relationship to the master: (1) The barbarian is matter without form and waits upon the form of the master for it to be ordered; and (2) The *ousia* of the barbarian is to obey the *ousia* of the master. In the latter option, the *ousia* of the barbarian is less perfect than that of its master and is thus moved by the *ousia* of the master according to what the later European tradition would variously call the *Scala Naturae* or the great chain of being. This ambiguity about the exact nature of the barbarian is reflected in Aristotle's own ambiguity about whether matter is *ousia* or not. At times, he denies that matter is *ousia* (*Metaph.* Zeta 3) but elsewhere, he writes "that matter is also *ousia* is obvious" (*Metaph.* Eta 1.1042a32; quoted in Pellegrin 1986: 70). Further, *ousia* exhibits a hierarchy within itself. At the top is essence and at the very bottom is matter: "sullen and posterior, unknown and unknowable" and "abasing the pristine universality of form" (McCumber 1999, 44–45). In any case, whether the barbarian is matter without form or is *ousia*, the barbarian can be understood as what needs to be ordered by the master. Below, we will see how the theorization of the relationship between the barbarian and its master follows the same metaphysical structure as the above discussion of *ousia*.

When this dualistic hierarchy, (which "exists in living creatures, but not in them alone; it originates in the constitution of the universe" (*Politics* 1254a28f)) becomes expanded onto the socio-political world, the animal which "cannot even apprehend reason" and merely obey their passions (*Politics* 1254a55-56) is identified with the body and the ruled, whereas (Greek) men are identified with reason and the ruler. The relationship between animals (unreason) and men

(reason) is one of ruled and ruler. Like the animal, *slaves* are in their best state when they are ruled by a (free) man, for, "the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different" (*Politics* 1254a56-57). The slave is analogous to the material cause and his master, the formal, efficient and moving cause. The slave benefits from being ruled by his master as he is himself without reason, but partakes of reason through being subjugated by his master (*Politics* 1254b22-24). There are a few characteristics worth noting from the infamous passage of the *Politics* on the theory of natural slavery:

> For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature a slave; hence master and slave have the same interest. Now nature has distinguished between the female and the slave. For she is not niggardly, like the smith who fashions the Delphian knife for many uses; she makes each thing for a single use, and every instrument is best made when intended for one and not for many uses. But among barbarians no distinction is made between women and slaves, because there is no natural ruler among them: they are a community of slaves, male and female. That is why the poets say—It is meet that Hellenes should rule over barbarians; as if they thought that the barbarian and the slave were by nature one. (*Politics* 1252a31-1252b9)

From this it can be seen that: (1) Aristotle's theory of natural slavery equates all non-Greeks with barbarians and barbarians with natural slaves such that non-Greeks are equated with ontological inferiority and ontological inferiority legitimizes domination. *Because* of the ontological inferiority of the barbarian, their domination by Greek men is ontologically justified. The slave like the animal, is all body (i.e., purely matter) and no mind, and as such should be ruled by those who embody mind (and transcend nature)—Greek men. (2) The proper *telos*, and the only *telos* of the slave is to be a slave. As Aquinas later explains, the slave is "almost an animated instrument of service" (quoted in Pagden 2015, 104). (3) The master and slave have the same interest, because the slave can partake of reason by imitating his master, but in his natural state he is incapable of fulfilling his proper *telos*. The relationship between the master and slave as described in Aristotle's theory of natural slavery has historically been applied to that between conqueror and conquered. Augustine's *City of God* quotes Cicero's *de Republica* as saying that the ruling of the provinces is just as "servitude may be advantageous to the provincials" because as "they became worse and worse so long as they were free, they will improve by subjection" (quoted in Isaac 2004, 183).

Aristotle's theory of natural slavery relies on the following assumptions: (1) A single ontological order in which all finite beings are fixed in an eternal order. (2) Each thing therefore has a *telos* and essence. (3) The world is metaphysically determined and so there is no possibility of any one thing changing its essence. (4) Things are not different due to the confluence of various circumstances, but as having been necessarily so for all eternity. The concept of the barbarian rests on a dialectical relationship with the master. The former is matter and wholly conditioned whereas the latter is form and unconditioned. In *Chinese Cosmopolitanism*, and inspired by James Baldwin, I argued that the psychology of racism rests on this very idea that "we" are unconditioned, whereas the racial other-cum-barbarian is wholly conditioned. As Baldwin writes, "white Americans do not believe in death, and this is why the darkness of my skin so intimidates them" (Baldwin 1998, 339). He continues,

> The only way he can be released from the Negro's tyrannical power over him is to consent, in effect, to become black himself, to become a part of that suffering and dancing country that he now watches wistfully from the heights of his lonely power and, armed with spiritual traveller's checks, visits surreptitiously after dark. (ibid.)

The only way to be rid of the malaise of racism is to admit that we are all conditioned, to realize that, as living beings, we all suffer the same fate of, decay, mortality and loss.

Underlying the Greek idea of the barbarian is that he is merely matter and matter is merely potential. The very etymology of the term "barbarian" testifies to this dualism in which the barbarian is an absence of form or reason. "Barbarian" derives from the Greek *barbarous* which refers to "someone who cannot speak Greek". Since there is a semantic connection between reason (*logos*) and speech (also *logos*), those who could not speak Greek were seen as devoid of reason. We see this connection between the inability to have (Greek) speech, with an inability to have reason in Aristotle. For Aristotle, the inability of animals to form civic society is due to their incapacity for the rational activity of speech (*Politics* 1.2, 1253a8–18; Aristotle 2007, 1988; Sorabji 1993, 15). According to Aristotle, the barbarian is like the animal in that he also has no capacity for reason and correct political organization. Representative depictions of the non-Greek as barbarians appear in Aristotle's writings:

> A bestial character is rare among human beings; it is found most frequently among barbarians, and some cases also occur (among Greeks) as a result of disease or arrested development. We sometimes also use

> "bestial" as a term of opprobrium for a surpassing degree of human vice. (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1145a 29–33; quoted in Isaac 2004, 199)

> People irrational by nature and living solely by sensation, like certain remote tribes of barbarians, belong to the bestial class, others who lose their reason because of a disease or insanity, belong to the diseased. (Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 1149a 9–12; quoted in Isaac 2004, 199)

The connection that the ancient Greeks makes between language and the capacity for reason testifies to an innatism in which the human being is defined according to ontological properties. Language acquisition is arguably a result of acculturation or inculturation. The foreigner can, for example, learn to speak Greek. The ancient Greek tendency to see those who cannot speak Greek as related to an ontological incapacity for reason makes the error of taking a provisional state (a current inability to speak Greek) for a fixed, eternal one (an ontological incapacity for speech and thus reason). The mistake evident here is the tendency to ontologize what is merely provisional.

The bivalent dualism inherent in the structure of *ousia* and the Aristotelian conception of causality is antithetical to the view held by Chinese metaphysics that everything is interconnected, everything is potential, indeterminate, with no excluded middle, in sum that interconnection and change is the metaphysical basis of life on this planet. Under the Chinese view, since all things are interconnected, everything has the potential to change and is thus creatively indeterminate. The world is therefore not constituted by fixed forms but the relationship of everything to everything else. In other words, all things are conditioned. The idea dominant in Greek metaphysics whereby order in the world is a function of form impressing itself onto matter, and thereby bringing what was merely potentiality into actuality, underlies the ideology of colonialism. This I describe in chapter five, "Metaphysics of Colonialism and Metaphysics of Harmony", in *Chinese Cosmopolitanism* (2023a). There, I describe the same bivalent dualism of Greek metaphysics via Plato's conception of the genesis of the forms. In contrast to the Greek idea that the order of reality consists in the imprinting of form (actuality) upon matter (potentiality), I describe the Chinese conception of the reason for cosmic order. This consists in bringing things into relationships that conduce to the mutual flourishing: harmony. In what follows I describe this Chinese metaphysics.

Chinese Metaphysics as Processual Holism: Everything is Conditioned

The Aristotelian concept of *ousia*—the assumption that there are unchanging essences underlying reality—has been formative for Western intellectual history. The biological concept of "natural kinds" and "species", for example, is indebted to this idea. However, recent work in the philosophy of biology argues that the tendency to see form as prior to change is unwarranted. In his foreword to *Everything Flows: Towards a Processual Philosophy of Biology*, the scientist Johannes Jäger writes of how deeply engrained "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" is in Western cognitive habits as well as in the practice and theorization of biology. This fixation with substance "consists in the unwarranted reification of objects, which become fundamental and replace the underlying dynamic reality in our thinking" (Jäger 2018, xi). Modern science suggests that this ideology of substance (fixity, endurance, boundary) is unempirical. Instead, boundaries are often ambiguous, such that it can be hard to say where one thing ends and another begins. Reality is a continuum of overlapping processes that provide no single, real way of dividing up reality into distinct "kinds" or "classes" of entities. The individuation of nature into distinct individual entities proves to be a slippery matter under a view of nature as continuous, processual, and holistic. A "promiscuous individualism" appears when we attempt to define individual entities, just as a "promiscuous realism" appears when we attempt to pinpoint natural kinds (Dupré and Nicholson 2018, 2–4).

The idea of natural kinds and species that Dupré and Nicholson speak of as a shibboleth that is stubbornly persistent in biological research speaks to the enduring power of the Aristotelian concept of *ousia*. Chinese metaphysics, however, does not have the idea of a cause or ordering principle that is separate from its material manifestation and which can be abstracted from the changes that this material manifestation undergoes. Under the Chinese view, all things are related to each other in the sense that they mutually condition each other in a never-ending process. Chinese metaphysics is thus well-described as "processual holism" (Xiang 2021b). As noted above, McCumber defines *ousia* in terms of "boundary", "disposition", and "initiative". By boundary is meant that the thing has definite spatial limits beyond which that thing no longer is; by disposition is meant the form or essence of the thing that orders the things that come into its orbit according to a standard that it gives itself (or is itself); and by initiative is meant the active potency of form to go beyond itself and shape matter beyond its boundaries. This active potency is realized by a quality passing from one thing to another, that is, when the boundaries of the two things are

transgressed. McCumber suggests that the idea of active potency is in tension with the boundary and initiative as the transit of form beyond its boundaries is transgressive. "It would be better for Aristotle, one suspects, if active potency did not exist" (McCumber 1999, 42), and "far better would be for the form of a living thing to remain permanently within its boundaries, i.e. for the living individual to be immortal" (ibid., 50). In Chinese metaphysics, we could say, the tendency of things to pass beyond its boundaries is taken as primary. It is this very "transgression", not the tendency of a thing to remain self-identical with itself, that is understood as the reason why things exist or is the principle capturing the fundamental reality of things. As we read in the "Change as the Ultimate Mandate" (*Yi ben ming* 易本命) chapter in the *Records of Ritual Matters by Dai the Elder* (*Da Dai Liji*, 大戴礼记), "it is due to change [*yi*, 易] that creativity and fecundity is ceaselessly generated" (Wang 1983, 256 my translation). Absent in Chinese metaphysics is the idea that reality is constituted by unchanging essences and the related idea of a forming principle that, self-identical with itself and keeps within its own boundaries, is the fundamental structure of reality. Chinese metaphysics assumes that the universe is anarchic, *ziran,* or, in Brian Bruya's phrase, is "spontaneous[ly] self-causing" (Bruya 2022) and all things in the world "autopoetic" (to borrow the term of Chilean scientists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela) (quoted in Shiva and Shiva 2019, 11). The universe is spontaneously self-causing because all things are understood to be conditioned. Each thing, instead of being understood as imperfectly imitating a transcendent or universal "form", is precisely what it is only *as a particular.* Thus, each "thing" is a unique focal point of changing relationships. Since each "thing" is a unique focal point of changing relationships, every "thing", even a cell or microbe, is interconnected, conditioned and so dynamic, evolving. Further, given that it is constantly responding to its changing environment, it is also autopoetic, self-organizing and free.

In Chinese metaphysics and under the view of processual philosophy described above, the reason why each thing has the form it does is not because of a reality antecedent to change and empirical experience. Because each thing is the focal point of infinite interrelationships, no "thing" has a "form" or *telos* or a strictly delimited way in which it can develop. Since every particular is related to all that is not itself, every particular can develop in ways that are unpredictable. As such, it becomes impossible to define a thing absolutely. A typical expression of this view that order is emergent as things change in unpredictable ways can be found in the "Reaching Utmost Happiness" (*zhile*, 至乐) chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, which declares the impossibility of defining and delimiting the constant transformation of things:

> The seeds of things have subtle workings [*ji* 几]. In the water they become Break Vine, on the edges of the water they become Frog's Robe. If they sprout on the slopes, they become Hill Slippers. If Hill Slippers get rich soil, they turn into Crow's Feet. The roots of Crow's Feet turn into maggots and their leaves turn into butterflies. Before long the butterflies are transformed and turn into insects that live under the stove; they look like snakes and their name is Qu-Duo. After a thousand days, the Qu Duo insects become birds called Dried Leftover Bones. The saliva of the Dried Leftover Bones becomes Si-Mi bugs and the Si-Mi bugs become Vinegar Eaters. I-lo bugs are born from the Vinegar Eaters, and Huang-Kuang bugs from Jiu-You bugs. Jiu-You bugs are born from Mao-Rui bugs and Mou-jui bugs are born from Rot Grubs and Rot Grubs are born from Sheep's Groom. Sheep's Groom couples with bamboo that has not sprouted for a long while and produces Green Peace plants. Green Peace plants produce leopards and leopards produce horses and horses produce men. Men in time return again to natural spontaneity [*ji* 机]. So, all creatures come out of natural spontaneity [*ji* 机] and go back into it again. (My translation based on Watson 1964, 117)

The account of change and generation that the *Zhuangzi* provides makes much sense if we take a long-range view of the history of our planet.

Contemporary science believes that the Earth has existed for 4.5 billion years. The first forms of life are believed to have arisen 3.5 billion years ago in the Archean period. It was two billion years ago, in the Meso-Proterozoic period, however, that we find the first evidence of eukaryotic cells, that is, cells that contain internal organs (organelles). Vertebrates appeared in the Cambrian period 535 million years ago and animals with four legs appeared 397 million years ago, in the Devonian period. The first mammals appeared 200 million years ago in the Triassic period. The first flowering plants appeared 130 million years ago, in the Cretaceous period. The first primates appeared 60 million years ago in the Palaeocene period. Hominins, ancestors to "modern" humans, appeared 6.5 million years ago in the Miocene period and the first "modern" humans—Homo sapiens—appeared 300,000 years ago in the Pleistocene period.[4] In the billions of years since there has been life on Earth, infinite types of organisms have appeared and disappeared. One type of organism that appeared and subsequently disappeared is the Prototaxites, a fungal-like organism that defies easy classification according to any now extant group of organisms. Flourishing from the Middle Ordovician (470 million years ago) until the Late Devonian periods (360 million years ago), it

4 https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/age-earth/.

had a diameter of up to 1 metre and a height reaching 8.8 metres.[5] The reality of now-extinct organisms like Prototaxites that defy easy categorization according to the natural kinds of present-day biological life counters the Aristotelian idea of forms and the project of classical taxonomy.

An example of the fundamentally dynamic nature of biological life that shows how organic life is not fixed, eternal and bounded is the panda. Whilst the panda is classified as a bear and shares many characteristics with bears in terms of its teeth, skeletons, muscles, and organ systems, it is unlike any other kind of bear in that it is an herbivore. Due to its feeding behaviour, habitat and enlarged wrist bone that functions like a thumb, the panda is also very similar to the red panda, which bears more similarities to a raccoon than a bear! The panda became what it is due to the unique environment in which it found itself (an abundance of bamboo, among other things). We understand the nature of the panda not by appealing to some atemporal form, but to the history of how its ancestors related to and changed according to its environment. Under this construction, the panda is not a particular that instantiates the universal of "bear-ness", but an ongoing narrative. Another example of how the truth about things is not a static essence but the history of its interaction with the environment is the fact that, as Jeremy Griffith writes in "From Leaky Pots to Spillover-Goblets: Plato and Zhuangzi on the Responsiveness of Knowledge" that the category of "reptile" is a fiction of abstraction that appeals to a transcendent essence. Given that reptiles, birds and mammals evolved from a common ancestor, "reptile" as an isolatable group makes little evolutionary sense (Griffith 2017, 228). Life changes in relationship to the world in which it finds itself and its "form" is a time-splice in a continuing history of change such that what our present perspective sees as a "form" is but a local and provisional consistency.

It is this metaphysical assumption of the creative indeterminacy of phenomena—that all phenomena are an emergent result of a coalescing nexus of different relationships—that underlies the Confucian understanding of self as a perpetual becoming. As I have argued in my two-part paper "Why the Confucians Had no Concept of Race", otherness only became so problematic in the Western context because the (racial) other was understood, under a substance ontology, to be *essentially* other, i.e. ontologically distinct from what is properly human. Under the traditional Confucian/Chinese process-metaphysics view of the self as a human-becoming, however, human-ness is not an essence that is congenitally and eternally possessed, rather, one *becomes* human through acculturation.[6] This cultural-processual as opposed to

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prototaxites.

6 Please see Xiang (2019a) and Xiang (2019b) especially, part I, section 3 "The Chinese Conception of the Human: Becoming 'Chinese' through Acculturation" and part II, section 4, "The Socio-economic-cultural Emergent Self: Becoming Human".

racial-ontological identity is reflected in the central tenet of Confucianism: "The basic educability of all human beings—even non-Chinese barbarians" (Slingerland 2003, 189). This central tenet has meant that, "the test of barbarity" throughout Chinese history "was not so much race or religion or national origin as it was cultural achievement" (Hsü 1960, 6). The Greek view, on the other hand, assumes an ontological dualism between Greeks (who embody form) and non-Greeks, who are "barbarians" (who are mere matter without form).[7] Due to the absence of the idea of unchanging form as the ultimate ordering principle, absent in Chinese metaphysics is the accompanying idea of a static ontological order in which each thing has a fixed place. Each thing and each self are creatively indeterminate and what "form" they have is a function of their environment. Under this view, the Aristotelian idea of a barbarian-cum-natural slave becomes a *non sequitur*.

The term "barbarian", does not have a single analogue in the Chinese language (Bauer 1980, 9; Müller 1980, 46, 56–7; Di Cosmo 2002, 95). The absence of any exact equivalent in the Chinese language that translates as "barbarian" substantiates my point that there is no concept of the barbarian in the Chinese tradition. As Nicola Di Cosmo explains, "It is well known that the term 'barbarian' common in a number of European languages, does not have a single analog in the Chinese language. Yet a number of terms designating foreign peoples (Man, Yi, Ti, Jung, Ch'iang, Hu, etc.) are routinely translated as 'barbarians'" (Di Cosmo 2002, 95–96, footnote 7). By "barbarian" is meant a Manichean other who is incapable of reason and moral behaviour. This subhuman other is ontologically incapable of civilization, thus the only possible relationship with them is one of subordinating them or annihilating them. The barbarian is a black hole that cannot be accommodated with the light that is civilization. The Chinese tradition has no such view of non-Chinese. Below, I offer a few examples of terms in the Chinese tradition that are commonly translated as "barbarian" and show that these are mistranslations. As we will see, the terms that are conventionally translated as "barbarian" are all proper nouns for specific groups of people. As the sociologist Byung Ho Lee writes, "these terms [Yi, Di, Rong, Man, Fan, Lu, and Hu] are basically generic words meaning 'aliens', and were employed indiscriminately in Chinese texts to indicate foreign peoples and their polities. Their usage was generally meant to be objectively descriptive" (Lee 2011, 205).

Whilst it has become common practice today to translate *yidi* (夷狄) as "barbarian", it bears remembering how recent a phenomenon this is. In the late 19th

7 Please see my summary of this history whereby the (Greek) barbarian is parsed as the polar opposite of that which is human, i.e. animalistic, merely material, irrational and incapable of transcending the state of nature in Xiang (2020), in the section "The Dualism of Civilisation/Barbarism, Moral Universalism/Cultural Relativism".

century, James Legge was translating still translating the term as "rude tribes of the east and north" (Legge 1861, 20) or "rude, uncultivated tribes" (ibid., 135). In a telling episode in the history of the term, Lydia Liu traces the identification between *yi* (夷) and "barbarian" to agents of the British state in mid-19th-century China who took offence at being designated as *yi* because they identified it with "barbarian". Despite Chinese protestations that the term was innocuous, in article 51 of the Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Tianjin of 1858 (an unequal treaty that ended the first phase of the Second Opium War), the British stipulated that Britain and British subjects were never to be referred to as *yi* (Liu 2004, 31–69). This episode is telling because the Qing government evidently did not deem the term *yi* to be so offensive that it could not be used in official diplomatic exchanges. This episode is also telling of the racial consciousness that the British operated under such that they would be so sensitive to anything approximating the European cultural understanding of the "barbarian".

Another term that is commonly equated with "barbarian" today is the Chinese term Qiang (羌). However, the term itself might be merely descriptive. Chinese records describe the Qiang as nomadic shepherds, implying that the exonym was descriptive rather than derogatory. In the *Shuowen jiezi* (Xu 2013), for example, the entry for Qiang is: "sheep-herding people of the Western Rong (戎)". The Austrian Sinologist-anthropologist, Claudius Müller writes that in the case of the Qiang, the sheep radical evidently points to the economic interpretation of the sheep (Müller 1980, 61). In any case,

> The difficulty of making statements about the names of tribes is heightened for the Chinese material of the Zhou and Han periods, because we do not know the original criteria for naming. As a general rule of thumb [*allgemeine Richtschnur*] the sinologist Boodberg's observation is valid: "that the early Chinese scholars in paraphrasing [*Umschreibung*] foreign words often chose those out of several possibilities the one that gave as faithfully as possible the foreign sounds as well as an indication of the semantic value of the original." (Müller 1980, 59, my translation)

Another term that is often identified with "barbarian" is Yao (猺), which Müller tells us probably goes back to the tribe's own self-identification, with which we are no longer familiar (Müller 1980, 60). The names of many different tribes also stem from the geographical locations and foods with which they are associated (ibid., 62). Another term that is identified with "barbarian" is *Rong* (戎). The *Rong* (戎) had the connotation of "military" before it was used as a name for a group of people (Creel 1970, 198) as the early form of the character is comprised of a

dagger-axe and, possibly, a coat of armour (ibid., 198 n8). The Rong were also known for their martial valour. For Creel, it was unlikely that all the terms for foreigners were terms of contempt (ibid., 198).

China currently accounts for about 20% of the world's population, and this number excludes the sizable Chinese diaspora. By the close of the 18th century, the population of 300 million people under Qing rule constituted 30% of the world's population, and by 1850 around 40% (Xiang 2023a, 213n1). The "Chinese" people could not have become so populous had they had a conception of the "barbarian" as an antithetical other. The Chinese people became so populous through what can be called "creolizing" with what would have been, at some point in history, "non-Chinese" peoples (see ibid., 28–38). One example of such "creolization" is in 108 CE, when 2,400 members of the defeated Qianglong (羌龙) tribe were admitted as inner subjects to the Han dynasty. As Yü Ying-shih writes, "It is clear that in the Later Han period [. . .] a large-scale movement of Ch'iang [Qiang] populations was taking place from points all along the western border into China proper" (Yü 1986, 429; Fan 1965, 2898–99). These resettled tribes were allowed to follow their own social customs and ways of life (Yü 1986, 383). The hybridity of the Chinese peoples is such that, as the Sinologist John Fairbank has written, the "inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom" were "themselves largely descendants of barbarians" (Fairbank 1942, 130).[8]

On both a theoretical level, which is reflected in the language, and on an empirical level, which is reflected in the hybridity of Chinese culture and the "Chinese" people, we see the absence of the structuring idea of the "barbarian". Should such an idea have existed in Chinese history we would see Chinese history mirror much of the colonial, genocidal behaviours of the West. Absent in the Chinese tradition is the idea of a "barbarian" who is without form and thus capacity for reason and moral behaviour and therefore marked out for subjugation and annihilation.

Acculturation, Sociality and the Authentic Self

In *A Philosophical Defense of Culture: Perspectives from Confucianism and Cassirer* (Xiang 2021a), I argued that Confucianism had a "cultural" conception of personhood. The cultural conception of personhood has much to do with why the Confucian-Chinese tradition has no concept of "barbarian", and why this tradition assumes that everyone is born human in the biological sense, but only some become authentically human in the sense of *ren* (仁). Below, I will further articulate this

8 For more textual examples of why the Greek idea of the barbarian is inapplicable to the Chinese context please see Xiang (2019a) and Xiang (2019b).

Confucian conception of personhood by borrowing from the ideas of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz and his work on symbolic anthropology.

In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Geertz argued against the idea that human dispositions are genetically prior to culture. Instead, as he writes, recent research in anthropology suggests that the human being's capabilities as realized are due to cultural amplifications or extensions of pre-existent dispositions. Geertz points to the fact that the final stages of human evolution occurred after the appearance of "culture", which implies that the idea of a basic, pure, unconditioned human nature or an innate constitution of human beings is "so functionally incomplete as to be unworkable". "Tools, hunting, family organization, and later, art, religion, and 'science' moulded man somatically; and they are, therefore, necessary not merely to his survival but to his existential realization. The application of this revised view of human evolution leads to the hypothesis that cultural resources are ingredient, not accessory, to human thought." (Geertz 1973, 82–83) For Geertz, the fact that the human brain and culture emerged synchronically as opposed to serially means that the latter stages of human evolution relied on the appearance of cultural mechanisms. The history of how we evolved in conjunction with cultural artefacts and institutions of our own creation means that "[t]he human nervous system relies, inescapably, on the accessibility of public symbolic structures to build up its own autonomous, ongoing pattern of activity". As a result, human thinking is first of all an act conducted through the terms of the common culture, and only secondarily a private matter (ibid., 83).

In *A Philosophical Defense of Culture* and following one of Geertz's intellectual influences, Ernst Cassirer, I argued that the human being is a cultural animal. What we can call culture or symbolic systems are extrinsic sources of information created by human beings in coherence with certain constants about the world and human being. Geertz himself described culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (ibid., 89). These are extrapersonal and interpersonal mechanisms or programmes for perceiving, understanding, judging and manipulating the world. They provide a template for the organization of social and psychological processes (ibid., 216). The reason why these cultural or symbolic templates are necessary is that "human behaviour is inherently extremely plastic". Human behaviour is only very broadly controlled by genes. This means that our behaviours, if they are to have "any effective form at all, [need to] be controlled to a significant extent by extrinsic ones". Humans differ from lower-order animals in that much of the behaviour of the latter are innate, instinctive, and almost completely pre-programed and physiologically performed. A spider immediately attacks the prey in its net without being taught to do so,

and birds learn how to fly instinctively. In human beings, however, "[t]he extreme generality, diffuseness, and variability of man's innate response capacities mean that the particular pattern his behavior takes is guided predominantly by cultural rather than genetic templates, the latter setting the overall psychophysical context within which precise activity sequences are organized by the former". The human being might be more accurately called "the self-completing animal"—"The agent of his own realization, he creates out of his general capacity for the construction of symbolic models the specific capabilities that define him." (ibid., 217–18) Unique among all biological life, humans are those that create their own (symbolic) environment for their realization. Whilst all animals need an environment amenable to their natures to survive, a human being can only survive through an environment of their own creation: culture.

Geertz's view that the human being is a self-completing animal that is suspended within and relies on the symbolic web of culture that they themselves have spun also describes the Confucian view of personhood. Confucianism would agree with Geertz that a person that was not brought up within culture would be so functionally incomplete as to be unworkable. Likewise, the idea of a humanity without culture would be a contradiction in terms. The Confucian conception of the human is that they are almost completely conditioned by environment and much of this environment is the socio-cultural milieu.

The Relational-Social Self as the Authentic Self

For Confucianism, the true self is the social self (*ren* 仁). As Tu Weiming writes, "sociality is a constituent aspect of the authentic self" such that society itself "is an extended self" (Tu 1979, 25). The Confucian view is that we are all born with the capacity to achieve our social (*ren,* 仁) natures. However, to become truly human requires acculturation. This acculturation is the formation of the self, such that the self becomes instinctively social. The achievement of this authentic humanity can be seen in Confucius' biography, where in *Analects* 2.4, by the age of 70, he could follow what his heart desired without transgressing what was right. At the end of his life, all of Confucius' desires are public-minded. To put it another way, since Confucius desires nothing that is antisocial, none of his desires transgress what is right.

For the Confucian tradition, we are born with the capacity for sociality, but to become our authentic selves requires socialization. This is achieved through the participation in culture as culture is inherently a public symbolic medium. For the Confucians, the defining examples of this formation through culture are *li*

(礼), *yue* (乐) and *wen* (文). The reasons that Xunzi gives for "bad" behaviour are all due to selfish and egoistic behaviours such as profit-seeking and sensual desires that are detrimental to public harmony. From their perspective, the egoistic conception of self is not the authentic self: it is pathological. This authentic human nature can be usefully contrasted against the idea of an egoistic sociopathy that sees others as merely means to arrive at one's own ends. Even though humans can become sociopaths, this capacity for sociopathy is not, for Confucians, what is the authentic human nature. Whilst the vast majority of humankind has the potential to be other-regarding, sympathetic and compassionate beings, this potential does not equal actuality. We are not born with a form that predetermines what we will become irrespective of the environment. This potential requires sustained effort, education as well as a culture that practices other-regarding habits. For Confucianism, it is the social nature of the human being that most authentically defines what we are, but this authentic state of the self is not biologically predetermined to be constant irrespective of the environment. Instead, as Lewis Gordon writes, "As relational, […] each human being is a constant negotiation of ongoing efforts to build relationships with others, which means no one actually enters a situation without establishing new situations of action and meaning" (Gordon 2021, 78). It is precisely interaction with our physical and social environments that determines our "natures". An example of how humanness is a product of acculturation as opposed to an essence can be seen in the famous story of Nie Xiaoqian (聂小倩) from Pu Songling's *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. Here, a female ghost becomes human through acculturation in human culture such as reading Buddhist sutras and acting according to ritually correct norms such as filial piety. This processual understanding of humanness contrasts with the Western tradition which overwhelmingly saw humanness as a static quality. It is the idea that barbarians cannot become acculturated that contributed to the racial violence, genocide, enslavement of large swathes of the human race under European colonialism, as well as the genocidal projects of the Nazi regime. If that which is perceived as "bad" cannot be rehabilitated for civilization, then the only solution is to extinguish it. Such a logic is a collateral part of a certain metaphysics that is absent in the Chinese tradition. As I have shown (Xiang 2023a, 56), antisemitism rests on a substance ontology in which the more the Jew tries to acculturate, the more fearsome he becomes to the gentile. Since the governing logic of antisemitism is that the Jew is an eternal Jew (*ewige Jude*), the Jew's attempt to assimilate through acculturation merely makes his Jewishness more disguised, concealed and so sinister. This invisibility makes his danger all the more threatening. Such a logic does not exist under the Chinese metaphysics I have described in which a person's acculturation *is* the authentic person.

For the Confucian inspired Chinese tradition, we are not born authentically human. This authentic self is a "second nature" that we become reconciled to through cultivation. A wolf-child that is not raised among human company cannot appreciate the pleasures of accessing the mind of an author from another time and another place, such as Gabriel García Márquez. This ability to understand and sympathize with others through symbolic mediation, be that through, language, art, music, or ritual is the distinguishing characteristic of the human and is a product of acculturation. As I have argued elsewhere (Xiang 2023b), this conception of personhood is comparable to the ideal of personhood that decolonial philosophers speak of: a non-essentialized self who, as a dynamic, creative work in process, realizes herself through interaction with others.

Conclusion

There is much misuse of the concept of the "barbarian" in its application to historical Chinese attitudes towards the non-Chinese. This is a practice that merely applies the Greek attitude towards non-Greeks to the Chinese context. This is not a trivial mistake. As this paper has shown, this unexamined borrowing of terms across cultural contexts insinuates Greek ideas about ontological order, the place of the human in cosmic order, and the nature of the human into the Chinese context. This paper has explored the differences in the Greek and Chinese views on these issues. Under the Chinese processual holist view, all things are related to each other in the sense that they mutually condition each other in a never-ending process. The human being, like the rest of the immanent world, is constantly changing. This assumption of dynamism is related to the Confucian view that the self is not born human. It is instead the process of the growth of the human, and how they relate to their environment, that comes to define them. It is therefore crucial that their inevitable conditioning is one conduces to them becoming authentically human. Borrowing from the insights of cultural anthropology, this paper has argued that, for Confucianism, what is authentically human is the ability to partake of interpersonal symbolic media that human beings themselves have created. It is this interpersonal symbolic media that cultivates a sociality that is authentically human. It is this symbolic structure that completes the human being such that, at the end of their life, the human being is qualitatively different from when they were a baby. The Confucian attitude is informed by the cultural anthropological observation (*avant la lettre*) that it is culture that defines us.

The reason why the Chinese tradition does not have the concept of a barbarian can be stated as follows. Given that it conceives of all immanent things as

conditioned by its environment and subject to change, the human is no different. Whilst the human being has limited control over the physical changes that they undergo, on a spiritual level, human beings have collective agency to determine their own becomings. The idea of the barbarian is incoherent with the Chinese conception that all things are conditioned and change and further, that it is their own creative realization through culture that defines what is authentically human.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
HUMANISM, POST-HUMANISM AND TRANSHUMANISM IN TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: Asian and European Paradigms

Political Theory and Ethics

The Politics of Pure Experience: Individual and State in *An Inquiry into the Good*

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Abstract

In this contribution, I shall attempt to clearly work out the political implications of Nishida Kitaro's theory of pure experience in *An Inquiry into the Good*. This effort comes in response to the multitude of vastly different claims about the political meaning and dangers of Nishida's early philosophy. Is it an implicit foundation for Japanese nationalism and the seeds of the controversial political philosophy he would work out later? Or is it a subtle attempt to critique the nationalist philosophy and educational policies surrounding Nishida while he was writing in the Meiji era? Or, perhaps most obviously, is this work unconnected with any and all political matters (including those that Nishida would face later on in his life)? In this paper, I shall argue that, although there is good reason to endorse any of these claims, ultimately a balanced assessment will find that Nishida's early philosophy was indeed apolitical in nature, and that attempts to claim the contrary inevitably either go beyond textual evidence or miss key elements of his thought. Yet, as I shall further argue, being apolitical hardly means that Nishida's work has no political consequences. Instead, for better or worse, the defining characteristic of Nishida's early political philosophy is its capacity to allow readers to transcend such political issues.

Keywords: Nishida Kitarō, pure experience, Miyake Setsurei, Nitobe Inazō, Meiji Period, nationalism, imperialism, self-realization

Politika čiste izkušnje: posameznik in država v *Raziskavah o dobrem*

Izvleček

V prispevku bom skušal jasno opredeliti politične posledice teorije čistega izkustva Nishide Kitarōja iz njegovega dela *Raziskave o dobrem*. Gre za odgovor na številne zelo različne trditve o političnem pomenu in nevarnostih Nishidove zgodnje filozofije. Je njegova filozofija implicitni temelj japonskega nacionalizma in seme kontroverzne politične filozofije, ki jo je pozneje oblikoval? Ali pa gre za prefinjen poskus kritike nacionalistične filozofije in izobraževalne politike, s katerima se je srečeval Nishida med svojim pisanjem v obdobju Meiji? Ali pa, kar je morda najbolj očitno, to delo ni povezano z nobenim političnim vprašanjem (vključno s tistimi, s katerimi se je Nishida soočil pozneje v svojem življenju)? V tem članku bom dokazoval, da čeprav obstaja dober razlog za podporo katerikoli od teh

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trditev, bo na koncu uravnotežena ocena pokazala, da je bila Nishidova zgodnja filozofija res apolitična po naravi in da kdor trdi nasprotno, neizogibno presega besedilne dokaze ali pa spregleduje ključne elemente njegove misli. Vendar pa, kot bom poskušal pokazati v nadaljevanju, apolitičnost še zdaleč ne pomeni, da Nishidovo delo nima političnih posledic. Nasprotno, značilnost Nishidove zgodnje politične filozofije je, v dobrem in slabem, njena zmožnost, da bralcem omogoči preseganje takšnih političnih vprašanj.

Ključne besede: Nishida Kitarō, čista izkušnja, Miyake Setsurei, Nitobe Inazō, obdobje Meiji, nacionalizem, imperializem, samouresničitev

Introduction

Reading through the pages of Nishida Kitarō's *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911), one finds little to no rigorous exploration of the political consequences of the unique conception of pure experience it has to offer. Instead, politics seem to be rather distant from Nishida's mind at this point in his intellectual career.[1] However, in his youth Nishida was concerned with Japanese politics and quite enthusiastic about the ratification of the Meiji Constitution in 1889.[2] Later on in his life as well, he could not avoid tackling the political issues facing Japan in the late 1930s and early 1940s, lending his name and philosophical terminology to infamously problematic texts on Japan's culture and place in Asia and the world.[3] However, *Inquiry*—the foundation[4] of his philosophical enterprise—seems to have avoided

1 Knauth (1965) highlights changes in Nishida's diary entries as evidence that he was not particularly "political" while writing *Inquiry*, and his interest in politics only picked back up around 1928.

2 Yusa (2002, 24–29) highlights the young Nishida's interest in (and enthusiasm for) Japan's new constitution, as well as his support for individual rights and interests.

3 These problematic texts include writings like "The Principle of the New World Order (*Sekai shinchi tsujo no genri* 世界新秩序の原理, 1943)" which seem to openly endorse both the emperor system and the imperialistic view that Japan ought to lead the other East Asian countries. The reason that I use this roundabout way of speaking about Nishida's culpability is because it is not entirely clear to what extent Nishida is responsible for the content of this text. Naturally, this includes the question of whether he wrote these papers enthusiastically or only due to the pressure put upon him by the navy. More importantly, however, there are questions about whether these documents were doctored or rewritten by those in the navy (and, assuming that the texts were altered in some way, there are further questions of the extent to which these documents were changed and how well they reflect Nishida's own stance). For a sympathetic viewing of the Kyoto School's political ventures, see Parkes (1997). A more critical view of Nishida's later political philosophy can be seen in sources like Lavelle (1994) and Osaki (2019). Discussions of Nishida's texts having been altered by the navy can be found in Arisaka (1996).

4 Nishida himself seems to agree with this prognosis, granted that he himself stated "that which I called in the present book the world of direct or pure experience I have now come to think of as the world of historical reality" (Nishida 1990, xxxiii). However, this does not mean that literally everything stayed the same, so it is not necessarily proof that Nishida's early philosophy directly connects to his wartime thoughts on politics, but it is evidence for anyone who takes such a viewpoint.

any difficult political questions, opting for more detailed analyses of the ontological, epistemological, and religious consequences of pure experience and leaving only simple explanations when tasked with discussing the relation between the individual to the state.

And yet, perhaps because Nishida avoided applying his ontological, ethical, or religious views to any events occurring at the time of writing *Inquiry*, his early philosophy has been interpreted as an endorsement of just about every political position imaginable. For example, Richard M. Reitan has found in Nishida's theory of pure experience (and the ethical worldview grounded therein) a subtle means of criticizing the statist educational and moral policies espoused in the "Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku ni kansuru chokugo* 教育に関する勅語)" (Reitan 2009, 139). Atsuko Hirai, on the other hand, accuses Nishida of propagating precisely the nationalist worldview that Reitan believes him to be criticizing.[5] This accusation is compounded by the fact that various post-war Marxist historians in Japan found in Nishida's early work the foundation for his later political thought and its alleged fascist tendencies, insofar as both necessarily end with a subjugation of the individual to greater communal needs. On the other hand, although he does not draw out the political consequences in detail, Itabashi Yūjin has offered a compelling case that Nishida's descriptions of pure experience can instead point us toward a state of "effortless" or "groundless" peace (Itabashi 2014). Finally, Christopher S. Goto-Jones takes this connection between pure experience and peacefulness a step further by arguing for a view of Nishida's early philosophy as an "ineffective and dissident" academic's endorsement of a utopian view of international cooperation (Goto-Jones 2005, 19–24; 66–67).[6] For a book that at times seems to be apolitical, or perhaps even naïve, it seems that Nishida's ideas concerning pure experience contain powerful implications that can vastly change both its potential appeal to contemporary debates about selfhood and the life of the individual in concrete political societies, as well as how we understand the beginnings of the history of the Kyoto School's connections to Japanese imperialism.

Hence, in this contribution, we will attempt to work through the political implications of Nishida's earliest philosophy of pure experience and, in doing so, accomplish the following two tasks. First, we will clarify the history of why Nishida's seemingly apolitical early philosophy has received so much scrutiny over the past century. Second, we will proceed through these past critiques in order to

5 See Hirai (1979; 1988, specifically endnote 94).

6 Note, however, that, Goto-Jones is never unaware of the political dangers of Nishida's early thought and, even if he does not cite any of the historians mentioned above, does discuss the potential problems that come with what we will later discuss as an "organic" view of politics (Goto-Jones 2005, 62).

make sense of whether or not an endorsement of pure experience could also entail any kind of undesirable endorsement of nationalism. In order to complete this operation, we will proceed in the following order. First, we will provide a brief and schematic summary of Nishida's early ethics to give a groundwork for our exploration of its political consequences. Second, we will contextualize this philosophical background within the framework of Meiji political thought in order to make sense of criticisms of nationalism from those who find some kind of latent nationalist or fascist tendencies in Nishida's early philosophy. In the third section, we will consider the validity of these criticisms in the face of Goto-Jones' detailed account of politics in *Inquiry*. In the final section we will reach our conclusion: That a careful interpretation of Nishida shows that his philosophy need not necessarily end in an endorsement of nationalism or utopianism, but was rather, for better or worse, a primarily aesthetic account of the good life of an individual, thus making it a means of transcending (or, perhaps better, escaping from) such political quandaries. We will then end this paper with several closing remarks and conclusions about what this means for contemporary authors looking to learn from Nishida's views on selfhood and individuality.

The Basic Idea: Pure Experience and Self-Realization

Now, as was mentioned previously, in order to make sense of the many different views on Nishida's early work in the introduction, we will first need to have a functional understanding of the main principles in his early philosophy. As is well known, *An Inquiry into the Good* was Nishida's first major work and was published in 1911 as a revised and completed version of several articles he had published in the early 1900s.[7] In this book, Nishida attempts to rethink the fundamental problems of philosophy arising from his re-evaluation of the nature of reality as pure or direct experience. *Inquiry* consists of four sections, each one dedicated to a specific facet of this enterprise (they pertain to, in order, his psychology/epistemology, ontology, ethics, and religion). While a complete rundown of the intricacies of Nishida's early philosophy goes beyond the scope of this paper, we will here attempt to understand precisely what pure experience is and how Nishida himself worked out the political consequences—namely the relationship between the individual and society—of this theory.

Now, the first step in reconstructing Nishida's early philosophy is to outline his goal in *Inquiry*. Luckily, Nishida provides a clear articulation of his aims at the

7 See Yusa (2002) for an in-depth explanation of the publishing process and the personal and academic influences on Nishida's writing during this time period.

beginning of the second section, stating he will strive "to understand true reality and to know the nature of universe" by "doubt[ing] whatever can be doubted, and proceed[ing] on the basis of direct and indubitable knowledge" (Nishida 1990, 38). To paraphrase, Nishida's aim was to rethink the nature of reality by taking only what is disclosed to us in our direct or indubitable knowledge, things that we cannot even begin to doubt. As for what this direct knowledge consists of, Nishida explains as follows:

> What is direct knowledge that we cannot even begin to doubt? It is knowledge of facts in our intuitive experience, knowledge of phenomena of consciousness. A present phenomenon of consciousness and our being conscious of it are identical; they cannot be divided into subject and object. Since facts are not separated even a hair's breadth from knowing, we cannot doubt this knowledge. Of course we can err when we judge or recollect a phenomenon of consciousness, but at such a time we are no longer engaged in intuition, for we have shifted to inference. The later consciousness—which is engaged in judgment or recollection—and the original consciousness are different phenomena of consciousness: intuition is not the judging of the original consciousness by the latter one, but simply knowledge of facts just as they are. […] All our knowledge must be constructed upon such intuitive experience. (Nishida 1990, 39)

By calling for a return to what is given in "direct experience" in the quotation given above, Nishida aims to remove from his philosophy any suppositions or dogmas that could never be "fulfilled" in intuition, rendering them instead as useful inferences that may help us understand the world in a simple way, but have no place in critical philosophical contemplation. The only way to achieve this goal, Nishida reasons, is to base our philosophical ventures on what is given in pre-subjective "pure" or "direct" experiences, i.e., that "most refined" (ibid., 4) state of experience that stands prior to the fabrications of thought or judgments about the world (for example, the state of consciousness in which we merely intuit a flower as it is given, before making any judgments about its colour or anything else) (ibid., 3).

The ramifications of this return to pre-subjective experience are as wide-reaching as they are shocking. Crucially, Nishida relies on this methodology to deny the existence of an independent subject or object in experience. From Nishida's viewpoint, there is no use in supposing a trans-experiential soul or subjectivity that could never be verified or intuited as existing apart from the world it lives in. Additionally, the supposition of a mind-independent world or any conception of a "thing-in-itself" would also be eliminated as a mere "demand of our thinking"

(ibid., 43). But perhaps the most important finding—particularly for our purposes—would be Nishida's claim that such pre-subjective experience does not necessarily require an *individuated* cognitive subject or self.

> Pure experience can, as discussed earlier, transcend the individual person. Although it may sound strange, experience knows time, space, and the individual person and so it is beyond them. It is not that there is experience because there is an individual, but that there is an individual because there is experience. *The individual's experience is simply a small distinctive sphere of limited experience within true experience*. (Nishida 1990, 19, italics added by the author of this paper)

As one can glean from the quotation given above, Nishida does not take the individual for granted as the "owner" of experience in any way. After all, there is no immediately evident "cut" between where my experiences end and the "world" begins and, as such, the only way that I can be demarcate myself as an individual is through the context that develops over the course of this experience. Thus, to assume that experience is "mine" and therefore independent of the world it lives (and other minds)[8] in is akin to abstracting only one small portion of the concrete whole.

The upshot of this line of thought is that, for Nishida, our "true self" or "true experience" does not consist in our individuated subjectivity. To the contrary, for Nishida, the true self is none other than the "unifier" (*tōitsu-teki aru mono* 統一的或る物) that pervades throughout reality and connects different individual experiences into a comprehensive system. Put more simply, contrary to our common belief that our self is an individuated subjectivity and the owner of experience, Nishida instead finds our "true self" to exist in continuity with the entirety of reality. Even more striking, though, is the positive ethical and religious connotations that Nishida attaches to this "true self".

8 Nishida offers two claims to support this unintuitive argument. First, the content of our thought and feeling is "entirely general" (Nishida 1990, 44). This means it is possible for two persons to share the same (qualitatively speaking) experience. Additionally, insofar as the content of consciousness is the same—since consciousness itself is qualitative – we must conclude that any experiences with the same content are, indeed, the same experience (ibid., 61). Hence, in the same way that we consider ourselves from yesterday and today as "the same" due to shared content (memories, beliefs, etc.), we can ultimately share experiences with others as well. While this may sound strange, anyone who has laughed or cried alongside friends will likely at least understand what Nishida is getting at. When our friend shares a sob-story, we probably do not distinguish between what is "my" misery or "her" sadness; rather, there is an event of crying, and it is only afterward that we can abstract how much of those tears were "actually" mine.

> Our true self is the ultimate reality of the universe, and if we know the true self we not only unite with the good of humankind in general but also fuse with the essence of the universe and unite with the will of God – and in this religion and morality are culminated. The method through which we can know the true self and fuse with God is our self-attainment of the union of subject and object. (Nishida 1990, 145)

> The most profound religion is thus established upon the unity of God and humans, and the true meaning of religion is found in grasping the significance of this unity, in breaking beyond one's own consciousness and experiencing the lofty universal spirit that functions at the base of consciousness. (Nishida 1990, 156)

The driving force behind either of these passages seems to be that in pure experience, understood as a state in which there is no distinction between subject and object, we find a "true self" that cannot be separated from the dynamic progression of reality as a whole—i.e., God. To understand the true self, then, it seems that we must achieve a state in which our typical perceptions of ourselves as a "subject", in contrast with the "objective" world, dissolve. Nishida gives multiple different examples of these cases – including, but not limited to, artists, musicians, and mountain climbers – but no matter how one achieves this state, the ultimate point is clear: To cultivate ourselves such that we are able to go beyond our usual sense of ourselves as limited and separate from the world and instead experience a one-ness with reality as a whole constitutes the highest form of religious consciousness we can achieve.

Now, putting all this aside, what can this quasi-religious view of the self tell us about the political life of the individual? The first, and most important point, is that we can extrapolate what is essentially the cornerstone of Nishida's early ethics just by understanding the general formula of his theory of pure experience:

> The good, conceived of as the development and completion of the self, amounts to our obeying the laws of the reality called the self. That is, to unite with the true reality called the self is the highest good. The laws of morality thus come to be included in the laws of reality, and we are able to explain the good in terms of the true nature of the reality called the self. Internal demands, which are the basis of value judgments, and the unifying power of reality are one, not two. (Nishida 1990, 126)

In conjunction with his theory of pure experience, Nishida disavows any moral standards that come from without.[9] As we can see in this passage, for Nishida, finding the true self in our continuity with reality is not only the highest good, but the source of all moral judgments. Cultivating the self, so one is able to achieve a state of pure experience, thereby takes priority over any other concerns (or, rather, any other ethical issues we may have can only be possible as a result of this demand for a greater unity within the self). To find unity in pure experience, Nishida explains, is to satisfy the most basic demand of the self and realize the full-extent of one's personality.

Now, one may here be convinced that Nishida is actively promoting some kind of selfish neglect for communal or political duties and urging individuals to do whatever they like in pursuit of this nebulous "true self". Crucially, however, Nishida applies his ontological considerations on selfhood to combat these claims.

> To follow the sincere demands of the self—to actualize the true personality of the self— does not mean to establish subjectivity in opposition to objectivity or to make external objects obey the self. Only when we thoroughly eliminate the subjective fancies of the self and unite with a thing can we satisfy the true demands of the self and see the true self. (Nishida 1990, 134)

> If we analyze individual consciousness, we do not find a separate, unifying self. But because there is a unity upon which a unique character arises and various phenomena are established, we consider this unity a living reality. For the same reason, we can consider social consciousness as a living reality. Like individual consciousness, social consciousness constitutes a system with a centre and interconnections. Individual consciousness of course has a foundation called the body, and in this respect it diverges from social consciousness. But the brain is not a simple material object – it is a collection of cells. This is no different from the fact that society is made up of the cells called individuals. (Nishida 1990, 139)

These two claims both come from the worldview described up to this point, but in different ways. In the first case, we find Nishida's claim that the desires of the

9 With that said, Nishida's claims are also partially substantiated by his systematic critique of all other alternative theories of morality, which are presented in the first half of the 3rd section of *Inquiry*. While we do not have time to go through these claims one by one, the only important point we ought to note is that the upshot of any of them is that any attempt to ground morality outside of the self is always bound for failure. For a more extensive description see Fujita (2022, 85–108).

true self are not selfish insofar as they should not be conflated with the desires of an individual standing in opposition to the rest of reality. Pure experience, as our true self, naturally tends to pursue a unity between subject and object, something Nishida sees as proof that there is an "ideal" or "ideational" force moving at the deepest reaches of the desires of our self (Nishida 1990, 123). In the second claim, we find Nishida further building off of the notion that an individual consciousness does not exist opposed to society insofar as individual consciousnesses comprise a greater whole to make the point that individual consciousnesses—as part of the same ultimate reality—comprise society in the same way that cells make up a body. This is a claim that Nishida would make several times throughout the book and in his research notes on pure experience, seemingly implying that all consciousnesses are part of a society, which are part of a state, which are ultimately part of the universal spirit mentioned at the very beginning of this section.[10]

The upshot of this is actually a rather tame view of the relation between the individual and society. Speaking very clearly, Nishida makes the following statement regarding the relation between "individualism" and "communalism":

> Individualism and communalism are spoken of as diametrically opposed to each other, but I think that they coincide. It is only when individuals fully engage in action and express their natural talents that society progresses. A society that ignores the individual is anything but a healthy one. (Nishida 1990, 137–38)

Putting aside how Nishida understood the words individualism and communalism, the idea is clear. Individual interests and social interests will never "truly" conflict, because they are both part of the same continuity leading up to the whole of reality. The goal of ethics is to develop the individual person, who therein manifests his or her talents in society. This brings a progressively higher sense of harmony, leading to a condition wherein all nations (and the individuals that comprise them) are able to express their unique characteristics on a global scale. The nation may not be the final stop in our quest to find a greater unity with the universe, but it is an important step in doing so.[11]

10 See Nishida (1990, 61, 138–39); see also Nishida (1966, 356–57).

11 "If we retrace the development of humankind from the beginning of history, we see that the nation is not the final goal of humanity. A meaningful purpose runs consistently throughout the development of humankind, and the nation appears to be something that rises and falls in order to fulfil part of humankind's mission. […] Genuine universalism, however, does not require that each nation ceases to be. *Rather, it means that each nation becomes increasingly stable, displays its distinctive characteristics, and contributes to the history of the world*." (Nishida 1990, 142; italics added by the author of this paper).

This is thus the consequence of Nishida's early philosophy and its views on the role of the individual in society. As we have seen, Nishida works through his philosophy of pure experience to ultimately conclude that the cultivation of individual talents in pursuit of the true self is the key to a good society, insofar as the two are ultimately inseparable elements of the same overarching reality known as pure experience. For many reasons, the conclusions presented here—with regard to politics, at least—will likely seem rather tame for many readers. Chief among these reasons is that Nishida ultimately comes away with little more than a vague description of a certain kind of individualism while leaving the bulk of his work to the metaphysical elements of the nature of selfhood, reality, and individual consciousness. Yet, as we shall see, this apparently innocent conception of society may connect to problematic tendencies among his contemporary writers.

The Charge: Subjugating the Individual to the State

As an observation that is equal parts important and obvious, the aforementioned ideas about ethics and individuality found in *Inquiry* are at least somewhat indicative of Nishida's historical milieu in the Meiji era. Indeed, it has been shown by various authors that interest in "self-realization" (particularly as it was described by the British Idealist, T.H. Green) echoed in both Nishida's work as well as in the thought of many of his contemporaries for precisely the reasons we have seen above.[12] Moreover, similarly to Nishida, many accounts of this claim were grounded in what has been referred to as an "organic" cosmology. In other words, Nishida was not alone in interpreting reality as a "macro-consciousness" or "macro-personality" that is made up of various "small selves", in the same way that an individual organism is comprised of its various cells. As a result of this proximity, however, Nishida has also been accused of sharing the same alleged problematic, nationalistic tendencies that are associated with such "idealist" or "organicist" authors. In this section, we will briefly cover not only how similar trends can be found in the Meiji era, but also what about this formulation could be conceived of as problematic or nationalistic in the first place.

Now, while a full-fledged investigation of self-realization and "organic" thought in the Meiji period goes far beyond the scope of this paper, we would do well to first recognize what has frequently been pointed to as the principle issue driving the

12 See, for instance, Stone (2018) for a genealogical account of how Nishida's ideas on individualism can be situated within Meiji period philosophy. Additionally, Hirai (1979) provides a thoroughgoing account of how widespread Green's philosophy was in late 19th and early 20th century Japanese intellectual circles.

development of such theories: The tension between the need for individual liberties and a unified sense of national identity. That is, as has been described by numerous other authors, the simultaneous need for responsible, self-sufficient individuals and a strict sense of national unity in identity – whether it be in education, language, or even a "national morality" (*kokumindōtoka* 国民道徳)—created a need to reconcile the actualization of the individual with the needs of the community.[13] To be more specific, while several early Meiji-era authors agreed with the likes of Fukuzawa Yukichi and Nishi Amane when they introduced the need for strong individuals as the principle problem facing Japan in the middle of the 19th century, not as many agreed with their assessment of human rights and a liberal view of social theory as the keys to producing these individuals, and concerns over selfishness and the possibility of prioritizing one's own needs over the state raised worries.[14]

Crucially, however, the same could not be said for the "organic scheme" of self-realization that I have been hinting at above. That is to say, self-realization, if understood in terms of the individual pursuing their complete or ideal form, did not aim to strike a balance between individual and community, but rather provide a metaphysical grounds for showing that individual self-realization could only be achieved while pursuing the "common-good". Again, as Hirai has pointed out, this metaphysical basis for combining the public good with individual freedoms was why Green (and his arguments that the ideal form of humanity is reproduced in the individual as society progresses) was so popular in the mid-Meiji era—as well as the reason why his philosophy was co-opted into so many different debates.[15] Additionally, the compatibility of this organic view with not only philosophers like Green, but also traditional East Asian or Japanese sentiments, was likely also helpful in legitimizing discussions of self-realization as consisting being equivalent to one's role in fostering the common-good (and thus that such self-realization cannot be reduced to individual selfishness).[16] Namely, the idea

13 Chapter 5 of Gluck (1985) provides a comprehensive view of how this tension manifested in debates on national morality, showing how the simultaneous need for morally upstanding individuals and a unified sense of Japanese identity contributed to impacting society in spheres as diverse as religious freedom, education, nationalistic fervour, and relations with foreigners in Japan.

14 Needless to say, this is a great oversimplification of concerns that does not factor in how the intellectual landscape of the Meiji era changed over the course of the 19th century. For a more nuanced view of concerns about selfishness with regard to individual liberties in the Meiji period, see Howland (2001).

15 At the same time, we should also recognize that—as Hirai (1979, 116–25) repeatedly stresses—no authors in the Meiji period seemed to fully grasp what Green meant by this term. While Green stressed equality between all individuals to the greatest extent possible, Hirai shows that almost all Meiji commentators mistook this notion of public good for a nebulous notion of national interests.

16 The relationship between this worldview and traditional Song Confucian and Japanese Buddhism thought is discussed by Inoue Katsuhito (2016) in more detail than we could hope to approach here.

losing one's "small self" and eventually regaining it by joining a "a bigger self" seems to have both matched with trends in the Japanese intellectual tradition, and also served as a basis to explain how the individual could be conceived of in terms of being enmeshed with a macro-consciousness or personality, rather than as a solitary entity.[17]

While going through all of the iterations of this formula going back to the early years of the Meiji era would go well beyond the scope of what we can hope to achieve in this contribution, we can take Miyake Setsurei as a paradigmatic example. Miyake, known as a journalist and philosopher active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, gave a straightforward version of what we are referring to here as the "organic" vision of the world. Most notably in his masterwork, *The Cosmos* (*Uchū* 宇宙), Miyake presents a worldview in which every step of reality can be considered in terms of the relation between cell and body. A community is made up of individuals, a nation is made up of local communities, the planet is made up of nations, and the universe is made up of planets, etc. This claim is based partially on the notion that philosophy should be done through making analogies between part and whole, a notion present in his work since his earliest philosophical enterprises,[18] and partially on his observations about the perceived rationality of the universe (Miyake 1909, 103–05). As far as Miyake was concerned, everything in the universe moved far too reasonably to be reduceable to blind materialism—the rationality and predictability of even physical phenomenon (the fact that reality "works" in the first place) is proof that even material entities are part of a larger, living whole that has its own purpose. In other words, the universe was a *living organism* and we individuals are the *cells* that make it run.

The ethical upshot of this worldview is that the purpose and movement of each component can only be understood with regard to the whole to which it belongs. In other words, just as the purpose of a cell is to uphold the health of the organism, the self-realization of the individual person can only be understood in terms of its relation to the purpose of the whole of the universe. With that said, as Miyake reminds us, we should remember that we may not ever fully understand the ultimate goal of the universe (beyond the quasi-religious experience of losing ourselves in the whole, which Miyake describes as the "subjective

17 As Tomonaga Sanjūrō prophesized while discussing the importation of Western theories of Personalism (*jinkaku shugi* 人格主義) into Japan, the traditionally Japanese or Buddhist tendency to find the self by losing the self remained prevalent in reconstructions of Western discussions on the importance of personality. Indeed, as Tomonaga states, "Personal idealism will be transpersonalized or non-personalized as it enters our country" (cited in Inoue 2016, 14).

18 As Miyake states in "A Brief Introduction to my Worldview", analogy is the "starting point" of his philosophical inquiry (see Miyake [1892] 1967, 245–48).

component" of his organic view of the universe) (Miyake 1909, 109). Instead, as Miyake notes in articles such as "The True, Beautiful, and Good of the Japanese People" (*shinzenbi nihonjin* 真善美日本人), we must limit ourselves to a whole whose purpose we can better understand which, at this point in our development as human-beings, is none other than the nation to which we belong. In a scheme similar to how we described Nishida's political philosophy in the previous section, Miyake states, "[t]o do one's best for the nation is to do one's best for the world. The growth of each nation's special characteristics will supplement the development of humanity" (Miyake [1891] 1931, 215).[19] Therefore, individuals can only achieve self-realization and find their true purpose by helping their particular nation contribute to the improvement of the world. Note that this idea need not imply that this goal looks the same for all nations, communities, or even individuals at this current moment. What is important is—just as different cells fulfil different roles in the body—each individual, community, and nation will exercise their talents within the context of helping the whole to which they belong thrive. And, again similarly to how individual cells are more likely to thrive in a healthy body, individual persons will also more fully realize themselves as they continue to build and improve their society.

Now, with this brief summary out of the way, we shall ask: what, if anything, makes this worldview problematic? For some scholars, the answer would be "nothing". In contrast, those like Nagatsuma Misao would argue that an organic worldview is not just blind nationalism or fascism, but is rather a strong defence of international diversity, promoting a political philosophy in which different individuals and nations realizing their own unique talents contributes to the self-realization of mankind as a whole.[20] As such, one could conceivably think that, whether it be Nishida or Miyake, there are no serious political issues that come from following this worldview. And yet for many post-war historians this notion of conceiving of part and whole, subject and object, or small self and greater self as two sides of the same coin, were little more than justifications of Japanese imperial ideology. Robert Wargo outlines a common theme among many of the early Nishida's post-war critics:

19 For a slightly more detailed explanation of what precise characteristics the good, true, and beautiful of the Japanese people consisted in, see Morita (2015, 16–22).

20 See Nagatsuma (2012) for a picture of Miyake as endorsing a strong view of international diversity and the rights of different cultures to self-determination. Morita (2015, 118–32) paints a slightly more nuanced picture of Miyake, acknowledging his approval of Japanese actions in Korea and Manchuria while still arguing that these actions need to be contextualized in their time period. For both, regardless of Miyake's conclusions on real issues, this logic should entail a strong belief in the importance of all cultures to contribute to the world's diversity.

> Marxists regard this passage [i.e., Nishida's claim the individual exists because of pure experience and not the other way around] as providing the grounds for their justly accusing Nishida of neglecting the individual at the expense of some whole (which is interpreted as referring to the state). They believe his guilt on this point justifies their placing of Nishida's philosophy in the camp of latent fascism. Moreover, the emphasis on experience can be utilized to "demonstrate" Nishida's idealism. I have no desire to become enmeshed in the tangle that surrounds the political interpretations of Nishida at this point, but the charge that this passage clearly stamps Nishida as an idealist is a charge which is grave enough to nullify the effect of much of his writing, if it is true. (Wargo 1972, 65)[21]

The idea is simple, but important. In one form or another, this view of the individual as one "part" of a whole (presumably the national spirit) ends with little more than the individual person being subjugated to the whole, rendering critical reflection or rebellion impossible, and ultimately serving as a tacit basis for "Meiji Absolutism". Indeed, while their methods and critiques all approach the matter differently, noted Marxist historians like Miyakawa Toru (1962), Miyajima Hajime (1960), and Funayama Shinichi ([1956] 1998; [1959] 1965) all agree that, even in his earliest philosophy of pure experience, Nishida ended up – albeit possibly unwittingly – enabling fascist policies by accepting the individual as being somehow subservient to the greater whole (i.e., the state).[22]

Naturally, there may be ways to avoid this conclusion that individual needs are ultimately bound to be subordinated to the state on this logic (or that this would necessarily be such a bad thing). However, there is one other point that is worth considering before returning to Nishida. Namely, if we conceive of individual persons in the same way we think of cells in a body, one may be concerned as to what happens when these "cells" are perceived as not contributing to the whole which they comprise. As an important historical example, consider Japanese attitudes towards Korea, wherein even "internationalist" authors like Nitobe Inazo referred to Korea as a "dead" or "fallen" country (*mekkoku* 滅国; *horobiru kuni* 滅びる国) which was not able to contribute to the advancement of humanity.[23] Insofar as the

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21 See also Wargo (2005, 35).

22 Again, the argument here is not if Nishida intended to support nationalist or fascist policies. The argument is that Nishida's philosophy of pure experience inherently leads to these conclusions. As Funayama ([1956] 1998, 182) states, "[s]peaking in terms of political problems, Nishida's philosophy also ended up as a foundation for imperialism and the emperor system. […] Of course, this does not mean that Nishida's philosophy surrendered (kuppuku 屈服) to the emperor system. Rather, it means that Nishida's philosophy had these elements as part of its essence."

23 See Kweon (2008) for an extensive examination of Nitobe's discussion of Korea as a perished country.

national spirit was, so to speak, sick, the Korean populace were in need of Japanese guidance to heal and continue contributing to the progress of the world. To paraphrase, in the same way that "sick" cells need to be cured for the whole body to be healthy, so too did Korea require revitalization.[24] Indeed, the idea that the neighbouring Asian nations required Japan's guidance in order to contribute to a greater purpose was not limited in its focus to Korea. If anything, such a worldview seems to have been the defining characteristic of Japan's imperial attitude leading up to the Second World War (and at least partially what Nishida has been criticized as endorsing in his later writings).[25] Finally, beyond even just the particular Japanese case, it is not hard to see how such views of statehood as an organism could connect easily with imperialism or totalitarianism in just about any intellectual tradition.[26]

In light of these comments, the problems associated with the organic philosophy present in the Meiji philosophical world likely become much easier to understand. To think of individual human beings in society in the same way that we think of cells in an organism is seemingly tantamount to saying that individual self-realization and interests are secondary to the needs of the state. Any diversion from this "national spirit" or resistance to common values could thus assumed to be ultimately deleterious to both the individual and the whole. At the ultimate level, these principles were deployed to justify Japanese intervention abroad (and could easily be applied to repress other cultures or minorities in a contemporary situation as well). If Nishida's philosophy of pure experience leads us to these conclusions, then there is evidently a problem that interpreters of his philosophy need to take heed of before glorifying the loss of the self to a greater whole. This raises two questions to be answered in the next section. First, is Nishida actually endorsing the kind of "organic" view of the world that we are supposing here? Second, if he is endorsing such a worldview, is there any way that he can necessarily escape the charges levelled against him?

24 See Kweon (2008; 2021) for different discussions of such connections between Japanese imperialism and such a "global" or "world" ethics.

25 This could be conceivably true both in terms of the conception of a "national body" or "national polity" as *kokutai* (国体), and in terms of Japan's vision of herself as a leader in Asia within the East Asian greater co-prosperity sphere. Or, perhaps put better, this organic view seems to be critical for connecting the individual to the enlightened state, which in turn guides surrounding nations. At any rate, what is important for now is that the view of the universe as a lived organism can mesh quite well with the actions taken, and rhetoric utilized, by Japan from the late Meiji period until the Second World War. For more on the notion of co-prosperity and Japan's role as a guide for Asian countries on their path to fulfilling their "world mission", see Arisaka (1996) and Osaki (2019).

26 See Berlin's ([1958] 2017) critique of notions of positive freedom for a detailed explanation of how this schema of finding true freedom in connection with a larger whole connects, by nature, to the same kind of totalitarianism we see in dictatorships throughout the world.

The Reality: Neither Wholly Nationalist nor Utopian, But Aestheticist

In the previous questions, we established a connection between Nishida's early philosophy of pure experience and—what we will call here—the organic worldview. While summarizing this stance, we have furthermore seen that the organic worldview has been accused of necessarily subordinating the interests of the individual to the needs of the state and, in extreme cases, justifying imperialistic policies. Importantly, Nishida himself did not explicitly support the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, nor did he ever apply his early philosophy of pure experience to concrete political issues. Additionally, as we saw above, Nishida at least claimed that his system did not end with the state being the ultimate goal of our self-realization. However, if this connection between the organic worldview presented above and the ability to justify imperialism or the suppression of individuals to a greater whole exists as a structural aspect of Nishida's philosophy, then readers of Nishida will have to admit that the very logical formulations at the heart of his early philosophy does contain the kind of fascist or nationalistic elements that would only be drawn out explicitly later on in his life. This raises two questions. First, is the early Nishida actually endorsing the kind of "organic" view of the world that we are supposing here? Second, if he is endorsing such a worldview, is there any way that he can necessarily escape the charges levelled against him?

Let us start with the surprisingly complex first question: Is Nishida's philosophy actually schematically similar to Miyake's? That is to say, did Nishida actually endorse a worldview in which (1) the individual exists as a "cell" or "part" of a greater macro-consciousness (i.e., the entirety of reality) and (2) achieves self-realization through losing her "small-self" to join with this larger self? In at least some respects, the answer to this question is obvious. As we have seen at the outset of this paper, Nishida ostensibly writes in the same language that those like Miyake utilized. Nishida's endorsement of such comparisons between the individual and society or reality and cells an in an organism have already been covered earlier in the paper. Nishida is also clearly convinced by the same logic that the promotion of individual cultivation makes for a stronger, more diverse society and, ultimately, world. Finally, losing the individual self in order to find a connection with the whole of reality appears to be the most striking aspect of Nishida's early philosophy. Multiple times throughout the book, Nishida cites various philosophers and religious texts (from both the Eastern and Western traditions) to claim specifically that losing the small self is to gain the "true" self.[27]

27 With respect to Christianity: "Our taking refuge in God seems in some respect to be a loss of the self, but in another respect it is the way we find the self. Christ said, 'he who finds his life shall lose

Now, with all of this out of the way, I do think there is an interpretation of Nishida's philosophy wherein he is not arguing for a scheme in which there are two distinct "smaller" or "greater" selves, much less that we literally fuse with the entirety of the universe. Or, to be more specific, a careful reading of Nishida's philosophy seems to reveal that Nishida might be better understood as arguing in favour of the individual self as part of the whole of reality as a *system of meanings*, rather than in terms of our typical views of the individual consciousness acting as part of reality in a "spatial sense". Moreover, to assume that there is a "small" self and a "greater" self would—if nothing else—seem to violate Nishida's premise that, in the end, all experience is pure experience.[28] Rather than thinking in terms of magnitude between small self and great self, I think there is a non-trivial reading of Nishida wherein the self should be considered as something closer to a *mathematical function* in that it serves as the unifying force that produces different results depending on the "variables" or "context" available at the time, but ultimately connects and unifies different sequences of experience through a shared "formula". If this reading holds true, then there is no such thing as a "greater" or "true" self and "smaller" self, but only the distinction between the unifying force of consciousness (i.e., our self as the "function") and the consciousness of oneself as an individual produced as this force develops greater context or meaning.

Of course, defending such a view in any full-blooded way would require far more space than we have in this contribution and, at any rate, would not fully solve the problem. After all, it is a fact that Nishida speaks in the language of individuals as "cells" in society.[29] In the end, if we were to limit ourselves solely to whether or not Nishida adopts a similar "organic" view of society or the state, the answer seems to be yes, in at least some regard. This leaves us with our second and more urgent question: Does this likeness between Nishida and his predecessors necessarily entail the justification of an imperialist worldview (or, otherwise, entail the

it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it,' and this is the purest form of religion." (Nishida 1990, 154) With respect to Buddhism: "The more we discard the self and become purely objective or selfless, the greater and deeper our love becomes. We advance from the love between parent and child or husband and wife to the love between friends, and from there to the love of humankind. The Buddha's love extended even to birds, beasts, grass, and trees." (ibid., 174)

28 See Nishida (1965, 300–02) for an unambiguous statement that all experience is pure experience.

29 With that said, I do think there are ways to reconcile these two views with one another. Namely, I believe that there is a reading in which we say that—insofar as the principles or structures at the base of pure experience are the same—it is possible for the system of meanings they create to aggregate and be shared by members of a community. Hence, even if there is no literal union of my perspective and your perspective, the fact that the context of our experiences all ultimately exist within the same system of meanings could serve as a whole to contextualize the individuals living in a certain community. See Stone (2022) for an articulation of such a view of selfhood in the early Nishida.

inclusion of elements that could be used to justify imperialism)? This question seems to me even more difficult.

Despite the tendency among post-war Marxist historians to include Nishida in the same category as other "idealist" or organicist thinkers of his time, it is not immediately clear that Nishida is subject to the same concerns that could be cast upon his contemporary authors. After all, there is at least one element that Nishida does not necessarily share with them, namely the *teleological* underpinnings that justify their nationalism. Indeed, as we saw when looking at Miyake in the previous chapter, there was a not uncommon assumption that the universe had some sense of "purpose", or was otherwise inclined to achieve something, even if we do not know what purpose is yet. The ultimate "goal" of pure experience that Nishida refers to on occasion is none other than the harmony between subject and object (or, perhaps better, between the individual self and the world it inhabits). Indeed, as we covered in the first section of this paper, Nishida places a clear moral and religious value on cultivating one's abilities to the point that there is no distinction between subject and object. It is not just that experience "can" lack any distinction between subject and object, but rather that it is structurally inclined to pursue such a unity. All this points to an important fact—the ultimate goal of pure experience is *not* to contribute to the state, but instead to find a sense of *harmony* with the rest of reality.

It is here where we find the grounds for the other, much more balanced interpretation of the political consequences of pure experience. In the end, Nishida's philosophy may be fruitfully read as a (possibly naïve) endorsement of a kind of pacifistic utopianism, given that the highest good is conceived of as harmony and one-ness with reality. Goto-Jones (2005), although certainly aware of the dangers that organic views of the state may present, explains that the philosophy of pure experience aimed at an (essentially) never-ending struggle to unite individuals into a more complete and larger personality, wherein different *enlightened* nations all allow one another to develop diverse individuals who all have something novel to contribute to this peaceful world order (Goto-Jones 2005, 66–67). This is a view that I find both truly compelling and to be based on a much more charitable reading of Nishida than any claims that his philosophy necessarily includes imperialistic or nationalistic elements. To understand through the quasi-religious state of feeling a sense of unity with the universe that one's true self lives in continuity with the various diverse elements that make up reality and, as a result, finding peace and harmony with humanity as a whole, seems to be a better representation of Nishida's early thought. Moreover, the connections between these ideas and some semblance of pacifistic utopianism seem to have at least some degree of textual support (depending upon

how one reads the brief passage in which global peace is referred to by Nishida explicitly).[30]

With all of that said, however, I do still have some doubts about how well this interpretation holds up to inspection. As an oversimplification of the matter at hand, consider a total annihilation of any group of humans or creatures that could bring about strife or cause the "unity" or "harmony" in our own society to crumble. In theory, this would reduce the amount of disharmony in the world and help ensure that the remaining individuals are better able to live in peace with one another. This is, obviously, not an example of pacifism nor enlightened utopianism, but why wouldn't it meet the standards for Nishida's scheme? After all, there would be a greater harmony after the early struggles. If what we are trying to achieve is a state in which there are no contradictions or struggles left to pull us from our more "unified" state of mind, then would not this kind of genocide be the most expedient way to achieve such peace? Naturally, one may say that this is a wilful misreading of *Inquiry*, insofar as the harmony Nishida advocates consists of the unification of all the diverse elements that make up reality, not a return to primordial homogeneity. After all, as Itabashi deftly explains, the very nature of peace in Nishida's philosophy is such that we are "co-present" together amidst all of the hectic and contradictory elements that make up our world (Itabashi 2014, 35–38). Or, perhaps more importantly, Nishida seems to imply that, because any disruptions in the unity or harmony of reality are a necessary step for reaching a higher good, we should allow for diversity to prosper, even if we butt heads sometimes, and that what is more important here is that we enjoy the moments of peace that come between these struggles.

However, if this is the case, then why do we need to worry about any kind of world peace in the first place? Regardless of what kind of wars or struggles are going on around us, they seem to be little more than the key to unlocking a greater level of diversity *qua* unity. In this sense, would not these struggles be something praiseworthy or, from a Nishidian perspective, necessary for achieving a higher good? If one considers Nishida's discussion of the nature of evil, this seems to be the case:

> To my way of thinking, there is nothing absolutely evil; all things are fundamentally good, and reality, just as it is, is the good. […] Fundamentally, then, things themselves contain nothing evil. Evil arises from the contradictions and conflicts of the system of reality. If someone asks about

30 There is not much to go on in terms of explicit calls for pacifism, granted, but one can glean disappointment from Nishida's claim that "[t]he present age is still one of armed peace," (Nishida 1990, 141) despite the fact that our personality demands "a social union that includes all humankind" (ibid.).

> the origin of these conflicts, we can answer that they are based on the differentiating activity of reality and are a necessary condition for the development of reality. Again, reality develops through contradictions and conflicts. Although, he constantly sought evil, Mephistopheles professed to be part of the power that constantly creates good. (Nishida 1990, 171)

If this is an accurate representation of Nishida's early ethics, then is there a way that he can avoid the seemingly absurd conclusion that things like war and famine are useful steps for furthering humanity? What would compel a human-being to take any kind of political action if these kinds of tragedies are but a mere step towards progress? At any rate, I suspect that no matter how you try to apply Nishida's early philosophy to concrete issues, one would end up with either abstract or absurd consequences.

The reason for this, I surmise, is that Nishida's early moral philosophy was ultimately neither nationalistic nor utopian. It was simply an "aesthetic" account of how the individual should live their life. Questions about world peace, international cooperation, or the individual's relation to the state were, it seems to me, secondary to concerns about how one ought to lead one's daily life. Indeed, the consideration of why doubts may remain with regard to any interpretation of Nishida's political aims is bound to end with more questions than answers, precisely because these issues were never fleshed out beyond the necessary level for Nishida to address what were—to my mind—relatively obvious potential problems. Most notably, Nishida seems to have offered enough to dissuade a potential critic from taking the view that his work was somehow selfish or radically individualistic in a way that could damage society as a whole. As such, it seems to me quite easy to agree with the common-sense doctrine that Nishida's early philosophy was apolitical. However, as we shall see in the next section, we must only admit this point on the condition that we also recognize that "apolitical" is not equivalent to having no consequences for the political life of the individual.

The Upshot: Embracing the Trans-ethical Element in the Early Nishida

The idea that Nishida bases his view of what he finds to be an intrinsic connection between the good or moral life and the aesthetically pleasing life is not mere speculation or interpretation on my part. It is rather directly verifiable within the text.[31] However, what does it mean to lead a beautiful life? One can easily imagine

31 "From this perspective, the concept of good approaches that of beauty. Beauty is felt when things like ideals are realized, which means for things to display their original nature. Just as flowers are

an artist or poet leading an aesthetically pleasing life—and indeed, Nishida praises those with an artistic vision throughout the book—but he does not seem to limit himself only to those who produce beautiful objects. Instead, when I refer to the aesthetic aspects of Nishida's ethics, I mean simply that the Nishida glorifies the individual who has cultivated herself to the point that she can express her "true" self without any need to contemplate her actions or detach herself from reality in reflection. In this sense, even a moralist doing a good deed without hesitation or a philosopher lost in the stream of thought could enter into the realm of an aesthetic life.

Why does this matter politically? After all, it seems quite easy to imagine how the glorification of this realm of aesthetic cultivation could be taken as "apolitical" or, perhaps better, how Nishida could be understood as promoting a realm of experience that goes beyond any temporary political confinements. I say this based on both his descriptions of the nature of evil and the transcendent state of consciousness this seems to imply. First, as was noted earlier, Nishida seems to imply that no matter what despicable act may take place, it eventually culminates in a higher good and serves as a stepping stone in the individual's process of self-cultivation. As such, it would seem that even wars, famine, and starvation are all only momentary or mundane issues that eventually lead to a greater unity in pure experience. Second, the state of moving in lockstep with reality, without any separation between oneself and the world, seems to go beyond any of these worldly concerns. Regardless of how the most recent election went or whether or not the nation is suffering, the artist achieving the pinnacle of aesthetic praxis will certainly not be torn from her canvas while she is at one with her brush. Or perhaps one could even say that any suffering she has endured due to war, starvation, or other tragedies becomes the basis for her to achieve a profound creative ecstasy.

This transcendence of "ordinary" ethical, legal, or political concerns could, as I mentioned earlier, easily be conceived of as "apolitical". And yet, this does not mean that there are no political consequences to Nishida's work. Instead, the glorification of a level of self-awareness that goes beyond worldly concerns is likely going to be a divisive claim. First, Nishida's pseudo-Leibnizian view of good and evil will certainly be difficult to embrace for many readers. The problems that come with this view are exacerbated by the fact that, contrary to Leibniz, Nishida does not suppose that an intelligent creator chooses from all possible worlds,

most beautiful when they manifest their original nature, humans attain the pinnacle of beauty when they express their original nature. In this regard the good is beauty. No matter how valueless conduct might appear when seen in light of the great demands of human nature, when it is truly natural conduct emerging from the innate talents of the person, it evokes a sense of beauty." (Nishida 1990, 125)

instead relying on the structures of experience to explain why it is safe to say that evil is but one developmental phase in the procession of reality. Moreover, it seems to follow intuitively from Nishida's philosophy that political praxis and contemplation are secondary to the cultivation of one's aesthetic engagements. There may be ways to work around this conclusion, but a less charitable reading of Nishida could take his philosophy as an excuse for those caught in turbulent times to hide their heads in the proverbial sand.[32]

And yet, for all the potential issues that one could find in this view (and its alleged tacit acceptance of imperialist rhetoric or thought), we would be hasty to unilaterally condemn Nishida's early philosophy as entirely problematic. As one can at least to some degree confirm from historical analyses, Nishida's philosophy can—if nothing else—help serve as a means to protect or preserve the private or existential life of the self beyond its value to the state, even during times of intense change or nationalistic fervour. My suspicion is that this is the reason why Reitan, as we mentioned before, found in Nishida a critique of the statist educational policies that would be crystallized in the "Imperial Rescript on Education", despite Nishida never mentioning the document in *Inquiry*. Now, to be certain, I am not suggesting we accept this view of Nishida as a critic of Meiji and Taisho policies on moral education in the same way we would other Meiji period philosophers like Onishi Hajime,[33] but I do think there is enough historical evidence to suggest that young students who felt overwhelmed by the pressures of their time period found shelter in Nishida's aestheticist worldview. While covering them all individually goes beyond the scope of this paper, Nishitani Keiji, Miki Kiyoshi, and Kurata Hyakuzo all report feeling existential relief upon having discovered Nishida's early philosophy of pure experience.[34]

32 For instance, Miyakawa Toru (1962, 117–32) has taken *Inquiry* as the "crystallization" (結晶化) of the tension between early Meiji liberalism and state absolutism, arguing that the early Nishida is offering a kind of "I-philosophy" (*shitetsugaku* 私哲学), similar to the kind of "I-novel" (*shishōsetsu* 私小説) found among the early 20th century naturalist novelists. In other words, rather than facing the concrete problems of Japanese society, Nishida instead focused on introspecting on his own life, retreating into the depths of the self, and expounding upon the quasi-religious experience of cultivating oneself to the greatest extent possible. In the end, for Miyakawa, *Inquiry* is essentially the beginning of Nishida's career as a bourgeois philosopher, speaking to the spiritual needs of the elite while ignoring the material needs of the working class (as well as the problem of absolute authority).

33 As one can see in Nolte (1983), Onishi not only offered a metaphysical explanation of the development of the individual's moral consciousness, but also applied these standards to a thoroughgoing critique of the "Imperial Rescript on Education" (*Kyōiku ni kansuru chokugo* 教育に関する勅語). My point here is not to say which of these styles are preferable, but merely to point out that Nishida should probably not be considered as a critic of nationalism in the same way that someone like Onishi is.

34 See Nishitani (1991); Kurata ([1912] 2020); and Miki ([1941] 1967).

At any rate, perhaps the political nature of this early philosophy can best be summarized in the following way: Nishida's political philosophy is apolitical, but this does not mean that there are no political ramifications, for better or worse. On the one hand, Nishida's early thoughts on the nature of evil and his implications that the achievement of pure experience go beyond such worldly concerns are naïve at best. Moreover, one may take issue with this worldview, insofar as it also seems to offer a path in which individuals can avoid their political obligations or need to reflect on society and solely cultivate their own lives. On the other hand, however, this emphasis on individual cultivation may not always be a bad thing. Instead, precisely because of such demands—particularly in times of growing nationalist or imperialist insistence on a shared national identity and morality—Nishida's philosophy could serve as a refuge for those seeking to preserve their internal privacy or peace amidst overbearing calls for some kind of political conformity.

Concluding Thoughts

As is often the case in these scenarios, a careful examination of the political ramifications of Nishida's early philosophy seems to reveal that there is a at least a kernel of truth in just about all of the different interpretations that have been put forward so far. The Marxists have non-trivial reasons to associate Nishida's philosophy with late 19th and early 20th century nationalism in Japan, and also good reasons to be wary of this view. However, there is also a more positive aspect of this philosophy, insofar as Nishida can (and, in all likelihood, did) offer an outlet to escape from overwhelming political discourse and find something beyond an individual's role in the totality of the state. Whether or not this necessarily entails an endorsement of any form of significant commitment to utopianism or pacificism is something I doubt, but keeping in mind the emphasis on harmony and unity among all of the diverse elements that make up reality, it is also not hard to see why Itabashi and Goto-Jones have found a connection between Nishida's early philosophy and peacefulness.

In the end, however, Nishida's political philosophy is precisely what most of his readers will likely assume it to be—apolitical. There are, as I have stated several times, positive and negative aspects to this stance. In the end, though, rather than tallying up these different factors and making any further value judgments about this conclusion, I believe there is a more relevant claim to be made here. Namely, those who intend to interpret or develop any conception of the self or the individual arising from pure experience will have to be careful of whether or not they want to commit to this apolitical schema, because Nishida's early work may not provide us with the tools needed for articulating a more nuanced view of a political pure experience.

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Humanization of Chinese Religion: From Heaven (*tian* 天) to Ritual (*li* 礼) in Xu Fuguan and Li Zehou

*Maja Maria KOSEC**

Abstract

This article aims to compare two interpretations of the emergence of new religious and moral concepts and beliefs in the period between the Shang (1600–1046 BC) and the Western Zhou (1046–771 BC) dynasties. It critically compares the theories of Xu Fuguan (1903–1982) and Li Zehou (1930–2021) on the process of humanization of Chinese religion. By emphasizing religious concepts such as Heaven, the Mandate of Heaven, the Way of Heaven on the one hand, and moral concepts such as virtue, reverence, and rituality on the other, the author illuminates the differences in each author's interpretation of the era in which Chinese culture moved away from religion and into the realm of humanism and ethics. This article reveals the reasons for these differences, which stem from the profound divergences in the basic methods of Li and Xu. While Li's elaboration is based on philosophical approaches, Xu Fuguan's understanding is based on philological and cultural analyses of the Chinese history of ideas. The author argues that these mutual differences between their interpretations demonstrate the importance of understanding different methodological approaches, which in turn allows for a deeper multi-layered understanding of the process of humanization of Chinese religion.

Keywords: Xu Fuguan, Li Zehou, humanization of religion, Heaven, ritual

Humanizacija kitajske religije: od neba (*tian* 天) do obrednosti (*li* 礼) v Xu Fuguanu in Li Zehouju

Izvleček

Članek kritično primerja dve interpretaciji pojava novih verskih in moralnih konceptov ter prepričanj v obdobju med dinastijama Shang (1600–1046 pr. n. št.) in Zahodni Zhou (1046–771 pr. n. št.). Avtorica primerja Xu Fuguanovo (1903–1982) in Li Zehoujevo (1930–2021) teorijo o procesu humanizacije kitajske religije. S poudarkom na verskih konceptih, kot so nebo (*tian*), nebeški mandat (*tian ming*) in nebeški dao (*tiandao*), na eni strani ter moralnih pojmih, kot so vrlina (*de*), spoštovanje (*jing*) in obrednost (*li*), na drugi avtorica osvetli razlike v Xujevi in Lijevi interpretaciji obdobja, v katerem se je kitajska

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kultura oddaljila od religije ter prešla na področje humanizma in etike. Članek obravnava razloge za prikazane neenakosti, ki izvirajo iz globokih razlik v osnovnih metodah in pristopih, ki jih uporabljata Li in Xu. Medtem ko Lijeva teorija temelji na filozofskih pristopih, temelji Xu Fuguanovo razumevanje na filoloških in kulturnih analizah kitajske idejne zgodovine. Avtorica trdi, da te medsebojne razlike med njunima interpretacijama kažejo na pomen razumevanja različnih metodoloških pristopov, sej le-to posledično omogoča globlje in večplastno razumevanje procesa humanizacije kitajske religije.

Ključne besede: Xu Fuguan, Li Zehou, humanizacija religije, Nebo, obred

Humanization of Chinese Religion through an Ideational-historical and a Philosophical Interpretation

This article aims to compare two interpretations of the emergence of new concepts and beliefs in the period between the Shang 商 (1600–1046 BC) and Western Zhou 西周 (1046–771 BC) dynasties. On the one hand, it will approach Xu Fuguan (徐復观 1903–1982), who is known as one of the representatives of the second generation of Modern New Confucians (*xin ruxue* 新儒学) (Sernelj 2013, 72), and on the other hand, Li Zehou 李泽厚 (1930–2021), who is considered one of the leading theorists of modern Confucian renewal, world theory of humanism, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophical anthropology (Rošker 2016, 229). Although Li Zehou was largely influenced by the Modern New Confucian stream of thought, and greatly appreciated Xu's work, he never wanted to be associated with this school.[1]

1 While Xu belonged to the school of Modern New Confucianism, Li formed his own version of "modern Confucian renewal". One of the differences between these two interpretations of Confucianism, for example, is already in the understanding of the division of the phases of Confucianism. While Modern New Confucians recognize only three phases (*Ruxue san qi* 儒学三期), counting Confucius and Mencius as the first, Song dynasty Neo-Confucians as the second, and Modern New Confucians, beginning with Xiong Shili, as the third, Li Zehou thinks that there were clearly four phases. In the first phase he places the period from the Warring States to the Qin dynasty, i.e. Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi; in the second phase the Han dynasty, where Confucianism partly merged with the teachings of Daoism, Legalism, Moism and the yin-yang school, where Dong Zhongshu and the "yin-yang and five phases" system (*yinyang wuxing* 阴阳五行) are key; the Song dynasty and the Neo-Confucians, among whom Zhu Xi stands out in particular, in the third phase; and the Modern Confucians in the fourth and final phase, which lasts to this day (Rošker 2019, 116–17). Li Zehou strongly criticizes the division of Confucianism into three phases, accusing the Modern New Confucians of several shortcomings. First, the singling out of heart-mind (*xin* 心) and humanness (*xing* 性) as central concepts of Confucianism, despite the fact that these two concepts appear only twice in the *Analects*, and not much more frequently in Mencius. Li therefore says that to label these concepts as fundamental is a clear deviation from the original Confucian doctrine. Secondly, the division into three phases, says Li, virtually wiped out Xunzi and the discourses of the Han dynasty. (Li, in Rošker 2019, 118) Although Xu Fuguan by no means excludes Xunzi from his treatment, as we shall see in the following chapters, this difference in the basic division of

In some areas, the work of Xu and Li addresses the same issue. One example is the analysis in which both deal with the process of change that the earliest religious concepts and ideas underwent before they transformed completely or became accepted as key concepts in Chinese Confucian ethics. Through the following pages I aim to critically analyse the way these concepts are approached in Xu's and Li's anaysis and search for methodological clues for such interpretations. The differences between their theories that manifest themselves through the present contrastive analysis of the ideas of both authors and their ideational backgrounds will serve as an exposition of certain discursive or paradigmatic differences between the work of a philosopher and a historian of ideas. So what were the ideational backrounds of both authors and what methods did they use?

Xu studied under Xiong Shili (熊十力 1885–1968) and later devoted himself to philosophy, the sociology of culture, literary and art criticism, becoming most famous as one of the first theorists of a specifically Chinese aesthetics in contemporary China (Sernelj 2013, 72). However he never formed his own philosophical system. In his work, he used a holistic approach, formed by dynamic holism and structural holism, based on the consistent consideration of the hermeneutic circle, which is very similar to Gadamer's hermeneutic method. The essence of Xu's structural holism refers to the understanding of the entity and its constituent parts, as well as thought and reality, within their concrete historical contexts. Precisely this interaction between the parts and the whole is, according to Xu, a key methodological principle that leads to the understanding of different currents of thought. Xu's structural holism is based on the assumption that a structural entity is a unit composed of reality, thought systems, and parts of classical texts. For the interpretation and criticism of these texts, it is necessary to use the method of structural unity, similar to the method of the hermeneutic circle. Xu understands human mentality and social reality as two dimensions of structural holism, which enables him to concretely deal with original ideas and different mental orientations. According to him, this is only possible through a comparative perspective. Xu thus studied Chinese thought through the socio-political and economic context, while he tackled the aspects of a certain era through literary and philosophical analysis. He understood this approach as a dynamic method and a comparative perspective, defined above all by constant change and development (Sernelj 2020, 104). Within his comparative perspective, Xu emphasized the importance of taking into account the specifics of Chinese ideological history and warned that the study of Chinese culture and mentality must necessarily begin

the history of Confucian thought is one of the key differences and stumbling blocks between Li Zehou and the adherents of Modern New Confucianism, especially Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) and Du Weiming 杜维明 (1940–present).

precisely with these. The key lies in the fusion of the objective and subjective and the individual and community, which in China has led to the fact that man's self-cultivation and the cultivation of the outside world represent one inseparable unit. Only by understanding such specifics placed in the socio-political context of an individual period can historians of ideas even begin to compare Chinese and foreign ideological traditions. Xu also points out that humans are historical beings, i.e. beings endowed with historicity. According to Xu, human beings live in concrete historical conditions and actively participate in the productive activities of reality, while constantly influenced by historical experiences and reality. People's mentality can thus only be interpreted within the discourses of their time. It is therefore absolutely necessary to consider each concept within its time-space context, i.e. through the interpretive method of contextualization (Huang 2019, 31; Sernelj 2020, 104–07). Huang (2019, 180) believes that Xu's interpretation of Confucianism is a typical example of the classical Chinese tradition of hermeneutics. However, we must understand this as a method of political science with political-economic and socio-political, but not ontological or epistemological, foundations. As a method, it does not deal with abstract concepts, but with the history of thought as a part of socio-political history.

On the other side of this article's comparison we have Li Zehou, one of the most recognized Chinese philosophers of our era. However, as Paul D'Ambrosio has noted, today's professors generally deviate little from normative academic standards. And while this is true in case of Xu Fuguan's approach, this is not the case with Li Zehou. At the very begining of his book *The Origins of Chinese Thought: From Shamanism to Ritual Regulations and Humanness* Li clearly states that in his opinion one can write the history of thought in two ways, historically and philosophically, and that this choice consequently corresponds to the respective methods. He chooses the method of "the classics commentating on [his] thought", which gives him the space to open up new and often controversial interpretations, which have not yet been consicered (Li 2018, 11). Aside from his contribution to other areas of contemporary Chinese though, Li Zehou is also the author of one of the most influential and scholarly innovative theories on the origin of Chinese culture. He argues that Chinese culture and Confucianism evolved from shamanism, and connects this theory with the rest of his philosophical system. Li devoted much of his philosophy to interpreting Marx and Kant and he complemented their interpretations with his theory of sedimentation (*jidian* 积淀), which he describes as the process dynamic psychological formations of human subjectality (*zhutixing* 主体性)[2] (Li 1999, 98). Li does not interpret human psychology (*renx-*

2 Subjectality is a recently coined neologism, which Li formed as a translation of the Chinese term *zhutixing* 主体性. Li here refers to Kant, for whom the study of the categories of mind was still

ing 人性) as arising solely from reason (*li* 理), as is typical of Western philosophy. On the contrary, Li emphasizes the contact between the emotional and the rational, or emotionality and rationality (*qingli* 情理) (D'Ambrosio, Carleo III. and Lambert 2016, 1060). Reason, Li suggests, gradually evolved from emotionality through concrete historical human experiences, with rituals in particular playing a key role (ibid., 1063). Closely related to ritual and emotion is Li's concept of the *culture of joy* (*legan wenhua* 乐感文化), which I will address with more detail later in this article. The feeling of joy (*legan* 乐感) here, however, refers to a range of emotions, emerging from shamanic dance and ritual ceremonies, which formed a necessary precondition for the formation of a sense of humaneness (*ren* 仁) (Rošker 2020a, 233). In reading Li's work we need to be awere of one thing: he writes in the style of the master and commentator tradition, which is rather different from Xu Fuguan's approach. If we are to truly appreciate his work, we must understand that he is "philosophizing with texts, rather than merely on them" (D'Ambrosio, forthcoming).

Thus, in order to confront Li's explanations based mostly within his own theoretical system with another based on more solid hermaneutical footing, this article aims to critically compare Li's ideas with those of Xu Fuguan. I aim to critically confront the theories presented by both authors, highlight the differences between them, and present the reasons for these differences, which arise from the just mentioned differences in both author's basic methods. I will argue that these differences between their ideas demonstrate the importance of understanding different methodological approaches, which in turn allows for a deeper and clearer understanding of the process of humanization and rationalization of Chinese religion.

In order to make the proposed analysis possible, it is now necessary to shed light on the social and historical context of the period under study. When the Zhou dynasty came to power, the original religion of the agrarian Shang dynasty, based on the worship of fertility, ancestors, and the supreme ruler Shang Di 上帝, had to subordinate itself to the Heaven-oriented religion of the nomadic Zhou. The beliefs of the Zhou people centred on the sun and star cults that were a typical feature of nomadic tribes and their predominantly shamanistic beliefs. Roughly speaking, the new Zhou dynasty was the successor of two different types of cultures: the agricultural system, which was the typical form of production of the

a "philosophy of consciousness" related to subjectivity (*zhuguanxing* 主观性). For Li, however, all theories of consciousness are based on theories that explain the origin of humanity. And this forms the basis for his new conception of subjectality (Cauvel 1999, 155). Subjectality is that which defines the difference between humans and animals, often defines specific human values, and occurs primarily in the realm of specifically human social existence (Rošker 2020b, 37).

defeated Shang, and the hunting and gathering system of the predominantly nomadic Zhou people (Rošker 2021, 46). The newly formed Zhou dynasty adopted some concepts and beliefs from its predecessor, but also developed its own ideas that greatly shaped the further development of Chinese intellectual history. The interpretation of the second generation of Modern Confucians argues, that it was during this period that the "Moral Self" as an ideological core of perception and identification of the individual began. Its emergance was the consequence of the meeting of various local cultures, each carrying their own religious belifs (Sernelj 2013, 80–81). The social changes and transformation of beliefs and religious concepts during this period, when China slowly moved away from religion and into the realm of humanism and ethics, offer an important insight into the development of Chinese culture.

Through the analysis of Xu's and Li's interpretation of the key religious and moral ideas and concepts of the just introduced historical period, this paper aims to introduce Xu's theory of the process of humanization of Chinese religion and and Li's theory of the process of rationalization of shamanism. I will compare both authors' contextualizations of concepts of Heaven (*tian* 天), the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命) and the Heavenly Dao or the Way of Heaven (*tiandao* 天道), as they claim were understood in the period between the Shang and the early Zhou dynasties. I will finally outline the crucial moral concepts such as virtue (*de* 德), reverence (*jing* 敬), and rituality (*li* 礼) that ultimately played a crucial role in the formation of Confucian moral humanism. Based on this analysis, I will argue that Xu's interpretation describes this period as the cradle of the first beginnings of the process of humanization of religion and the dawn of spirit of humanism in China, and links it to the concept of *concerned consciousness* (*youhuan yishi* 忧患意识), while Li Zehou's interpretation introduces the theory of Chinese shamanistic-historical tradition and the rationalization of shamanism, and connects them with the idea of the *culture of joy.* I will finally consider the question as to whether or not Xu's idea of connecting the birth of human self-awerness with the idea of *concerned consciousness* should be understood as the opposite to Li's idea of the interconecction between human subjectality and the *culture of joy*.

Views on Early Chinese Religion and the Dawn of Human Agency

Xu believes that all human cultures began with original religions, i.e. forms of belief in miraculous powers that arose from a sense of terror and deep fear of natural disasters. Each original religion also began with mythology and superstition. However, as knowledge advanced, people began to reject the element of

superstition, and as a result the original religions experienced a decline. "The decline or growth of a religion depends on its ability to break away from superstition in the face of the resistance of human knowledge and develop meaning beyond superstition", says Xu. The meaning of overcoming superstition must lie in the affirmation of humanism in real life, especially in affirming, promoting and guaranteeing the value of human life. It is precisely the value of life that is in turn the ultimate foundation of religion, Xu concludes (Xu 2014, 32). In the original religions, we cannot yet speak of any kind of self-awereness or consciousness, and this was also the case in the Shang dynasty. Xu thus argues that humanism in China gradually developed from the spiritual liberation of the theocracy that occurred after the end of Shang rule. Religion in the Shang period "was still primordial. Their behaviour, according to the records of divination, was entirely determined by external deities—ancestral spirits, nature spirits and Shang Di." The Shang's belief in mysterious forces, which stemmed from their fear of natural disasters and other calamities, was not yet an expression of human self-awareness. It was not until the Zhou dynasty that a shift toward humanism took place (ibid., 14–16).

> The Yin dynasty followed the regulations of the Xia; wherein it took from or added to them may be known. The Zhou dynasty has followed the regulations of Yin; wherein it took from or added to them may be known.[3]
>
> 殷因于夏礼，所损益，可知也。周因于殷礼，所损益，可知也。(Lunyu, Weizheng 23)

> Zhou had the advantage of viewing the two past dynasties. How complete and elegant are its regulations!
>
> 周监于二代，郁郁乎文哉。(Lunyu, Ba Yi 14)

Xu uses these quotations from the Analects to argue that the Zhou cultural system was based on the legacy of the Shang dynasty (Xu 2014, 16). Therefore, the Shang and Zhou dynasties should not be considered as two different cultural systems, but as a form of development of one into the other (ibid., 19). "The victory of the Zhou over the Yin was the result of the victory of a spiritually conscious ruling group over a ruling group that felt inadequate due to the absence of spiritual consciousness", Xu argues (ibid.). That the Zhou based their rule on their succession of the fallen Shang is also evident in many records from this period. Indeed, the Duke of Zhou (周公 reigned ca. 1042–1035 BC) also justified the legitimacy of

3 This and all the following translations of the classical sources are made by James Legge.

this transfer of power to the Zhou by emphasizing the transition between the Xia 夏 and Shang dynasties that occurred at the time of the transfer of the Mandate of Heaven from Xia to Shang. In doing so, Zhou emphatically acknowledged that the Shang dynasty held the Mandate of Heaven and served as the representative of Heaven until the Mandate passed to the Zhou (ibid., 16).

> Zhou became the new victor after the fall of Yin, but in early documents from the Zhou period we do not see the usual haughtiness of a victorious people, but rather a sense of "concerned consciousness" as recorded in the *Book of Changes*.[4]
>
> 周人革掉了殷人的命（政权），成为新的胜利者；但通过周初文献所看书的，并不像一般民族战胜后的趾高气扬的气象，而是《易传》所说的‘忧患’意识。(ibid., 19)

The main difference between the *concerned consciousness* that became characteristic of the Zhou period and the terror and despair that prevailed before is that the anxiety arises from the subject's vision. It is based on a reflection on the situation in which the subject finds himself, and in which a close connection can be established between the subject's actions and his responsibility for the outcome of the matter. It is out of this sense of responsibility, when one wants to overcome difficulties by one's own efforts but has not yet managed to do so, that *concerned consciousness* arises. In the case of the early Zhou period, it was mainly the delicate situation between the last Shang King Zhou (纣王 ca. 1105–1046 BC) and the first Zhou King Wen (文王 ca. 1112–1056 BC). This sense of anxiety was then passed on to the Dukes of Zhou and Shao (召公 died ca. 1000 BC) and from them to the people in general (ibid., 20). The *concerned consciousness* of this period is also evidenced by a number of quotations:

> But I [Duke of Zhou] am the servant of Heaven, which has assigned me this great task, and laid the hard duty on my person. /…/ Do not be distressed with sorrow. We shall surely complete the plans of your Tranquillizing father (King Wen).
>
> 予造天役，遗大投艰于朕身；越予冲人，不印自恤。/…/ 无毖于恤，不可不成乃宁考图功。(Shang Shu, Zhou Shu, Da Gao, 5)

With the transition from terror and helplessness under the Shang to a state of *concerned consciousness* under the Zhou, the basis of human belief gradually shifted from gods to humans, and this is what Xu calls the beginning of Chinese humanism.

4 Translated by the author.

Li Zehou, on the other hand, also addresses the issues of religious belief in the Shang and Zhou dynasties. He explains that Chinese culture developed from a shamanistic tradition, which he sees as a connection between people and Heaven, conceiving of Heaven, Earth, and people as equally great. It is a system in which humans holistically coexist with the eternal cosmos (Heaven) (Deng 2018, IX). However, at a certain point in history a crucial change occurred, according to Li: A "severance of communication between earth and heaven" (*jue ditian tong* 绝地天通)[5] ended the earlier practice of "everyone being shaman and historian" (*jia wei wu shi* 家为巫史)[6] and resulted in only shamans holding the privileged social role of mediator between Heaven and Earth. In the inscriptions of the Oracle bones, the terms shaman (*wu* 巫) and god (*di* 帝) are often used together, clearly showing that the shaman held the highest religious role and was responsible for communicating with Heaven (Li 2018, 15).

Since the survival of entire tribes depended on shamanistic rituals, spiritual sacrifices and worship, which at this time took place almost every three to five days, these had to be performed very precisely. This led these practices to evolve into very complex ceremonial forms and norms, which Li refers to as *shamanistic ritual ceremony* (*wushu liyi* 巫术礼仪). While their subjective purpose was to communicate with the spirits and ancestors and bring good fortune and prosperity to the clan, objectively they also consolidated the clan by maintaining its order (ibid., 20). From earliest times, shamanistic ritual ceremonies were closely associated with ancestor worship and the worship of Shang Di. In the post-Shang period, however, the former strongly prevailed over the latter. Although there are many different interpretations of the relationship between Shang Di and the dead ancestors, their close connection is undeniable. Li here leans on Chang Kwang-chih investigations, which showed that in the Shang dynasty the distinction between the world of divine spirits and the world of the clan ancestors was basically imperceptible. The dead ancestors were a direct link between humans and gods, between this world and the other. They were the protectors of the clan and the state, and connected human achievements with the world of spirits by uniting them in a single body (ibid., 13–4). Since the boundary between the dead and the living, between humans and their spirits, has always been blurred in Chinese tradition, the practice of serving the dead was synonymous with serving the living and continued for centuries. Through the relics passed down from shamanistic culture, which closely linked the spiritual and human worlds, the position of the latter was elevated to the point where people in general could no longer fully comprehend their human limitations and began to search for meaning themselves, without the

5 Translated by Robert A. Carleo III.

6 Translated by Robert A. Carleo III.

help of external forces (Rošker 2020b, 45). Li believes that the Chinese tradition has never actually focused on the search for a higher transcendental world, but instead on the search for ethical and social rules (D'Ambrosio, Carleo III. and Lambert 2016, 1059). In Li's view, Deng explains, the human struggle of the Chinese was never sustained by the idea of an eternal power, but was always based on people's own efforts to achieve the unity of nature and man. In this struggle to prolong their existence in this world, the *culture of joy* emerged (Deng 2018, XI). The term *culture of joy* also translated as *culture of optimism*, has a threefold semantic connotation. It refers simultaneously to the "culture of worldly happiness", to an optimism about one's ability to improve one's living conditions, and to the "culture of music and aesthetics" (Wang 2018, 235). Li explains that the Chinese tradition was often criticized for lacking the depth of Western pessimism. However, this optimistic attitude was closely linked to the lack of belief in the support of an omnipotent God, as one simply had to fight for progress oneself (Deng 2018, XI).

> Yet in reality lacking any such dependence their struggle and hardship are much greater than those of people who have such support. It is from this dimension that Chinese thought ought to be further developed, and in which we recognize the forced smile of its "culture of optimism" and profundity of its deep sorrow. (Li in Deng 2018, XI)

The reason for this difference between the Chinese and Western traditions is that the West developed on the basis of religion, while Chinese culture, on the other hand, emerged from shamanism, Li argues. And the crucial difference between shamanism and religion lies in the affirmation of human subjectality. In this view, the rationalization of the shamanistic-historical tradition and its notion that humans (and not the gods) are the most fundamendal, was the one which finally led to birth of the *culture of optimism* (Li 2018, 94).

Interconnection between Politics and the Humanization of Religious Concepts

In the Shang dynasty the concept of a supreme deity Shang Di was still very clear and present, as was the concept of divine command (*di ming* 帝命), which can be equated with a kind of Mandate of Heaven. Accordingly, Xu argues, people must also have been familiar with the concept of Heaven, although, interestingly, it does not yet appear in the records of the time. The character 天 (*tian* Heaven) appears as the character 大 (*da* great) in the oracles. However, we should not conclude from this that the concept of Heaven was not known to the Shang people,

only that the characters *tian* and *da* were interchangeable at that time. "It seems unreasonable that men who lived on the great plain by the Yellow River, with the sun, moon and stars in a large candle above them, until the Yin dynasty, when the technology represented by bronze vessels was already very advanced, would not have had a sense of the stars above" Xu writes (Xu 2014, 18). The terms Heaven and Mandate of Heaven are found several times in the *Book of History*, proving that these were concepts the Zhou had adopted from the Shang dynasty cultural system. The Zhou also adopted the concept of Shang Di, and although the concepts of the Supreme Ruler (*di* 帝) and Heaven were often used interchangeably in the writings of the period, the title *di* referred specifically to the personality of the supreme god, while Heaven mainly described the world in which the deities dwelt, Xu explains (ibid., 17–18). The new Zhou rulers combined the concept of Heaven, which they had inherited from the Shang with their own family system, making the Shang Di one with the Son of Heaven (*Tian zi* 天子). This approach justified the rulers' quest for absolute power and at the same time followed the original nomadic tradition of the Zhou culture (Rošker 2021, 47).

However, the connection between the ruler and Heaven was not direct. As shown in a story in the *Book of History*, when his brother King Wu (周武王, reigned ca. 1046–1043 BC) died, Duke Zhou asked if he could replace the latter's body with his own (Shang Shu, Zhou Shu, Jin Teng). However, the Duke of Zhou did not ask Heaven directly, but turned to the three ancestral spirits, King Tai, King Li and King Wen. They were the ones who could convey his request to Heaven and to Shang Di, who could decide on it. The tradition of using deceased ancestors as intermediaries in communicating with Shang Di and Heaven was also adopted by the Zhou from the Shang (Xu 2014, 17). However, according to Xu, since the ancestors of the lower classes had no position on Earth, they also had no power in Heaven and therefore could not mediate between Heaven and their descendants. In this way, the people of the lower classes belonged directly to Heaven, and their relationship with it was more direct than that of the ruling class (ibid., 28).

While in the Shang period popular belief in Shang Di or Heaven did not yet contain ethical elements, in the Zhou period it became associated with morality. In the early days of the Zhou dynasty, the *concerned consciousness* of the ruling class also made Heaven an almost anthropomorphic deity, constantly watching over the human world and reflecting on each of its events. In its role as supreme deity, Heaven was not only the creator of human beings, but also their supreme judge, distributing praise and punishment according to the morality or immorality of their actions (Rošker 2021, 47). While the lack of self-awareness of the humanistic spirit at the end of Shang rule did not seem to cause a fundamental rethinking of religion, the situation changed with the emergence of self-awareness in the

Zhou (Xu 2014, 37). During this period, the Mandate of Heaven increasingly began to take human behaviour as the standard for its decisions and no longer supported those in power unconditionally. As a result, it also gradually began to lose its mystery and become more and more tangible and connected to human behaviour (ibid., 24). People began to put aside their sensual desires and focus on their own responsibility and rationality (ibid., 22). Respect for the Mandate of Heaven and building one's own moral virtues became the key to attaining and maintaining the Mandate. In other words, the ruler's moral virtue became a condition for Heavenly support, as it was no longer unconditional and unchanging as in the past. The Mandate of Heaven turned elsewhere in the case of poor rulership, leading to the belief that the mandate was unknowable and unreliable. As Xu described the situation at that time: "If we abandon our actions and rely only on the Mandate of Heaven, then we cannot easily understand Heaven and we cannot trust it either." Thus, since Heaven could no longer be relied upon, a turn to the human was necessary, and this is what led to the humanization of Chinese religion. However, in the early Zhou era, Xu says, it was still too early to completely break away from religion, so another transformation of religious thought had to take place first. People began to understand the Mandate of Heaven through their political leader, more specifically King Wen. The Zhou people no longer revered King Wen only as their ancestor or as a great political leader, but also associated him with the Mandate of Heaven for religious reasons (ibid., 25–26).

> Heaven is not to be trusted. Our course is only to seek the prolongation of the virtue of the Tranquillizing king [King Wen].
>
> 天不可信，我道惟宁王德延。(Shang Shi, Shang Shu, Jun Shi 1)

> The doings of High Heaven, Have neither sound nor smell. Take your pattern from king Wen, And the myriad regions will repose confidence in you.
>
> 上天之载、无声无恶。仪刑文王、万邦作孟。(Shi jing, Da ya, Wen Wang zhi shi, Wen Wang 7)

This, Xu argues, represents a leap toward a rational spirit of humanism that respects the Mandate of Heaven, but also knows that it cannot understand it. In doing so, the rational spirit led people to understand that when dealing with the incomprehensible, one cannot rely on divination and shamanism, but must be inspired by the concrete virtues of the ruler. King Wen thus became the concrete manifestation of the Mandate of Heaven, and his virtues became the true content of the divine. As such, we see that the relationship between King Wen and Shang

Di is not only closer than that of the other ancestors, but that Wen actually transcends the role of intermediary and becomes a divine representative. This has led some authors to conclude that King Wen was a shaman, Xu says, going on to note that this was not the case. The central worshipper of the deities was the king, who was hierarchically above the shaman. The shaman's mind was focused on Heaven, while King Wen's mind was entirely devoted to the human world and solving domestic problems. Thus, the position of King Wen in the minds of the people of the Zhou dynasty was actually a symbol of the awakening of the humanistic spirit in religion (Xu 2014, 27–28).

In this process, another aspect of humanism was born. The intentions of the people became the voice of the Mandate of Heaven, and the ruler had to interpret its wishes through the lives of his people. From the beginning of the Zhou dynasty, it was believed that Shang Di chose political leaders not for their own sake, but for the sake of the people, to select the one who could act on behalf of the masses. The Mandate of Heaven was thus not to descend first upon the king, but upon the people. It was precisely because of this incomprehensibility of the Mandate of Heaven that the belief prevailed that the Mandate should be freed from the shackles of shamanism and divination and made to face the people, says Xu. Heaven, the Mandate of Heaven, and the people usually appear together in Zhou dynasty texts. Xu believes that this is the beginning of a moral humanist spirit that illuminated the value of human existence for the first time in Chinese history (ibid., 29–30). Xu Fuguan here connects his analysis to his political thought by arguing that, according to true Confucian thought, the people should be the subject of the political order. However, since in the actual course of history absolutist imperial power was never limited, these ideals were not realized. Xu calls this the double subjectivity (*shuang chong zhutixing* 双重主体性),[7] which forms one of the central concepts of his political thought (Chen 2011, 26–27).

This is connected with the fact that in the following decades the moral-religious consciousness of the early Zhou eroded faster and faster, and since there was no independent monastic class and political and religious activities were mostly inseparable, people began to see the will of the gods in the actions of political leaders. This meant that the immorality of political leaders simultaneously represented a failure of the gods' credibility. The inefficiency, corruption and nepotism of the ruling class gradually led to the decline of the idea of the Mandate of Heaven, which led to the further development of humanism in China. By the end of the

7 This concept means that in the Chinese philosophical tradition (with the exception of the Legalist school) the people were seen as the autonomous subjects, however in the social reality of the despotic system the ruler always appeared as the subject. In this way the unsolvable basic contradiction between the Confucian ideal and the despotic reality was reproduced throughout Chinese history.

Western Zhou period the traditional religious concepts that had their roots in the early Zhou dynasty had almost completely dissolved (ibid., 37). Heaven and the Mandate of Heaven had lost their authority, but people still held them in high esteem. We can see the decline of Heaven's authority in many poems from the time of King Li's reign (厉王 reigned 877–841 BC). Xu notess the following passages:

> Heaven is now inflicting calamities, And is destroying the State. My illustrations are not taken from things remote; Great Heaven makes no mistakes.
>
> 天方艰难，日丧厥国，去譬不元，昊天不忒。(Shi jing, Da Ya, Dang zhi shi, Yi 12)

> O thou bright and great Heaven, Shouldest thou not have compassion on us?
>
> 倬彼昊天，宁不我矜。(Shi jing, Da Ya, Dang zhi shi, Sang Rou 1)

> There is nothing to arrest the doom of the kingdom; Heaven does not nourish us.
>
> 国步蔑资，天不我将。(Shi jing, Da Ya, Dang zhi shi, Sang Rou 1)

By the time of King You's reign (幽王 reigned 781–771 BC), religious concepts and belief in the morality of Heaven had almost completely collapsed (Xu 2014, 34).

> Great and wide Heaven, How is it you have contracted your kindness, Sending down death and famine, Destroying all through the kingdom? Compassionate Heaven, arrayed in terrors, How is it you exercise no forethought, no care? Let alone the criminals: They have suffered for their offences; But those who have no crime, Are indiscriminately involved in ruin.
>
> 浩浩昊天，不骏其德。降丧饥馑，斩伐四国。旻天疾威，弗虑弗图。舍彼有罪，既伏其辜。若此无罪，沦蛋以铺。(Shi jing, Xiao Ya, Qi Fu zhi shi, Yu Wu Zheng 1)

While in the case of the Mandate of Heaven we can speak of its will and purpose, and the notion of a personal god was still present to some degree, this connotation disappeared with the transformation from Heaven to Destiny (*ming yun* 命运) at the beginning of the Eastern Zhou era. Destiny encompassed all inexplicable and

unsolvable human issues, but it no longer possessed a will or purpose of its own (Xu 2014, 35).

While Xu Fuguan views these changes from the perspective of the birth of the humanistic spirit and liberation from theocracy, Li Zehou develops his theory based on the rationalization of shamanistic practices. Li argues that the worship of totems, shamanistic dances, and songs that were typical of the shamanistic tradition were gradually replaced by the humanized and rationalized worship of heroes and ancestors during the transition from the Shang to the Zhou dynasties (Sernelj 2018, 339). In his explanation, Li relies on a Chinese archeologist Chen Mengjia 陈梦家 (d. 1966), who tells us that ancestor worship and the worship of celestial gods gradually converged and intermingled, giving rise to the paradigm of post-Shang Chinese religion, namely the predominance of ancestor worship over the worship of celestial gods. With this gradual integration of god and ancestor worship, the integration of religious and political authority also took place (Li 2018, 12–14).

> From the earliest shaman leaders to Yao 尧, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, Tang 汤, Wen 文, Wu 武, and the Duke of Zhou 周公, and even including Yi Yin 伊尹, Wu Xian 巫咸, and Bo Yi 伯益, all of these revered ancient legendary or historical political figure can be seen as great shamans who had consolidated both political power (kingly authority) and spiritual power (religious authority) into single person. (ibid., 16)

Here Li uses many examples to show how the ancient kings communicated with Heaven. One of the five legendary god-kings, Zhuan Xu 颛顼, advocated reliance on spirits to establish social obligations (*yi* 义) because only he was able to manage the affairs of Heaven. The Xia dynasty kings Yu 禹 and his son Qi 啟 are also often associated with shamanistic ritual. The *Fayan* 法言 speaks of the "Walk of Yu" (*Yubu* 禹步), which was often used in shamanistic rituals as a technique to invoke the spirits. His son Qi also performed a dance called the "Nine Changes" (*Jiudai* 九代), in which he rode dragons and connected with spirits (ibid., 16–17).

What Li Zehou is trying to show is the difference between dynamic and human-centred shamanism, in which humans and the divine are intimately connected, and static and rational religion, in which humans are clearly separated from the superior and objectified deity (ibid., 22). Li emphasizes that in shamanistic rituals the interaction with the spirits was proactive, not passive as in many other religious traditions. "This direct engagement with the divine evinced human agency as well as continuity-rather than separation-between the human and the spiritual" (Carleo III 2018, 7). In these ceremonies the human agency was highly

pronounced, and the spirits here were not objective beings separate from the activities of humans. It was only the shamanistic activity that formed a precondition for this form of the divine to occur. In other words, the existence of the spirits is inseparable from human activity, as the spirits have no independent transcendent or transcendental existence (Li 2018, 21).

While not forgetting about the transcendent aspects of Heaven, Li explains that the first origin of this Chinese concept developed through the transformation of ancestral spirits. From the early Zhou dynasty, Heaven replaced the legendary emperors and assumed the position of supreme deity. However, it then took a different path and developed as naturalized rather than the image of a personal god (ibid., 85). Knowing Heaven was the key to ruling over people, and the intertwining of Heavenly and human affairs remained one of the characteristics of shamanism. Shamanism then gradually evolved into symbolic activities, a path that was different from the emergence of a supreme personal god. In the context of the rationalization of shamanism, calendrical calculations and the observation of celestial phenomena became the central fields of research at this time. Over time, the model of Heavenly guidance became more and more rationalized, clearly reflecting the process of rationalization from shamanism to historicism (ibid., 27–29). Through this process, and through the increasing predominance of political over spiritual authority during this period, the connection between Heaven and humans shifted entirely to the office of the king. As Li concludes: "The fundamental qualities of "shamanism" were directly rationalized from the path of the integration of shaman and king, or political governance and religion, to become the basic characteristics of the mainstream tradition of Chinese thought" (ibid., 19).

In the Zhou period, Heaven was seen as something rewarding virtue and goodness and punishing excess, representing the "Heavenly Dao" or the "Way of Heaven". The Way of Heaven became understood as a vague and ambiguous supreme ruler that possessed unpredictable functions and divine power. However, it never separated from the worldly human experience and thus began to form "a formal imperative or governor of objective principle that also includes human emotionality" (ibid., 85). The Way of Heaven included regularities, imperatives, and developmental principles that Li regards as "the most fundamental psychological development of the history of Chinese culture and thought" (ibid., 86). At this point, the Way of Heaven basically served as a substitute for god for the Chinese people, Li argues. However, due to the tripartite unity of religion, ethics, and politics in China, the concepts of Heaven, "Dao" (道), and the Way of Heaven continued to be directly linked to the political and ethical aspects of the "Way of Humans" (*rendao* 人道) (ibid., 88).

> "Way of Heaven" and the "Way of Humans" are one and the same "Way." Heaven, the Mandate of Heaven, the Way of Heaven, and Heavenly will always exist and arise within the Way of Humans. (ibid., 37)

The close connection of the Way of Heaven with the Way of Humans formed a basis for the development of pragmatic reason (*shiyong lixing* 实用理性)[8] in China, which in turn led to the importance of ethics and morality (ibid., 90–91). The Way of Heaven, Dao or the Way of Humans were not understood as any supernatural ideas, but instead as a form of government implied by nature itself. None of these concepts possessed will or the ability to speak, which led them to be understood primarily as expressed through the natural environment, actual life, and the principles of political governance (ibid., 88), and this is a connection that appears in Xu Fuguan's texts as well.

Between Rituality, Ethics and Aesthetics

With the birth of *concerned counsciousness* the basis of human belief shifted increasingly away from the divine and toward recognizing responsibility for one's own actions, Xu argues. This brought along a sense of endeavour, which reflected also in the ideas of reverence (*jing* 敬), virtue (*de* 德), and reverence of the virtue (*jing de* 敬德). The concept of virtue initially had no qualitative moral meaning either, and it simply referred to a person's behaviour. It was not until the Wenmo period of the Zhou dynasty that virtue began to appear as reverence of virtue (*jingde* 敬德) or luminous virtue (*mingde* 明德), thus acquiring a positive moral character. Xu holds that reverence of virtue means to act seriously, while the idea of lumionous virtue means to behave wisely. Later, the meaning expanded to denote virtuous behaviour that springs from the human heart. However, each type of virtue was filled with reverence. Reverence here did not mean letting go of one's responsibilities and surrendering to the divine, as religious reverence does. This newly emerged concept of reverence referred to a kind of human spirit that puts responsibility before desire. It refers to a pshicological state of a subject that is active, rational, and reflexive (Xu 2014, 23). When Xu talks about the early kings, he quotes the *Book of History*:

> The Duke of Zhou said, "Oh! those kings of Yin, Zhong Zong, Gao Zong, and Zu-jia, with king Wen of our Zhou, these four men carried

8 Pragmatic reason, another of Li's concepts, is a unique form of non-transcendental moral reasoning that evolved from the shamanistic-historical tradition and is characteristic of traditional Confucian thought (D'Ambrosio, Carleo III and Lambert 2016, 1063).

> their knowledge into practice. If it was told to them, 'The lower people murmur against you and revile you,' then they paid great and reverent attention to their conduct; and with reference to the faults imputed to them they said, 'Our faults are really so,' thus not simply shrinking from the cherishing of anger."
>
> 周公曰，鸣呼，自殷王中宗及高宗及祖甲及我周文王，兹四人迪哲。厥或告之曰，小人怨汝詈汝，则皇自敬德，厥愆，曰朕之愆，允若时，不啻不敢含怒。(Shang Shu, Zhou Shu, Wu Yi 6)

This is a clear indication of reverence in the early Zhou, Xu thinks. It is precisely this concept of reverence and its meaning that distinguishes Chinese humanism and that allowed Chinese culture to progress even at the institutional level, transforming the cultural heritage of the Shang into a new, morally grounded tradition (Xu 2014, 23). However, when we mention the Shang cultural heritage, we should first address the issue of rituality.

The concept of ritual developed from the practice of sacrifice. In his etymological analysis, Xu suggests that the character *li* itself is composed of the radical *feng* 豊, which refers to ceremonial pottery in the Oracle bones, and the radical *shi* 示, which refers to the ritual of worship itself. We cannot say that the concept of ritual was already present in the Shang period, but we can confirm, according to Xu, that this concept developed from the practice of worship in the Shang dynasty. Xu believes that all the rituals of the Xia and Shang dynasties that we read about in later literature consist of a concept that emerged later in history. Since the Zhou had not yet introduced their own sacrificial rituals at the beginning of their dynasty, when they replaced the Shang, they continued to use the rituals of the Yin dynasty. Xu further analyses the early Zhou dynasty texts and concludes that "the spirits and gods are treated as one thing and 'rituals' as another" (ibid., 38–39). In early Zhou literature, the word ritual actually appears only once, in a line stating that ritual is "that which is required by the rules of propriety of our kingdom"[9] (Shang Shu, Zhou Shu, Jin Teng 2). Xu also notes a quotation from Jun Shi:

> (These ministers) carried out (their principles), and displayed (their merit), preserving and regulating the dynasty of Yin, so that, while its ceremonies lasted, (those sovereigns), when deceased, were assessors to Heaven, and its duration extended over many years.[10] (Shang Shu, Zhou Shu, Jun Shi 2)

9 我国家礼亦宜之。

10 率惟兹有陈，保义有殷，故殷礼陟配天，多历年所。

All other terms for rituals from this period refer to sacrificial ceremonies. This means that it was not until later in the Zhou period that people began to pay special attention to the meaning of ritual itself, thus shaping the concept of ritual as such. The idea of ritual as we understand it in the later texts did not emerge until the late period of the Western Zhou dynasty, when religion had already lost much of its power. Only then was attention paid to the humanistic elements of ritual, but even then ritual could not be separated from sacrifice. Another related concept that was influential at that time is that of norms (*yi* 彝), which also initially referred to the vessels used for worship. Only in later works such as the *Book of History* did *yi* transform into a humanistic concept that implied moral norms. By the end of the Western Zhou, ritual had thus become a sum of the original sacrificial meaning of ritual and the more abstract idea of norms, which by this time already reflected the spirit of humanism, and together formed a new understanding of the concept of rituality (Xu 2014, 37–40).

Refering to the same realm of ideas, Li uses the concept of virtue (*de* 德) to make the connection between early ritual practices and later moral ethics. Li believes that virtue originated in sacrifice in the shamanistic rituals of ancestor worship and initially referred only to a "mysterious quality possessed by the shaman". Only later did it evolve into "the conventional regulations of various clans". Virtue thus slowly shifted from mysterious magical powers to behavioral characteristics of the king and eventually to morality in general. In the early Zhou, however, this shift reached only the second stage and related mainly to the king's activities, such as worship and military actions.

> Over time, this was integrated with the shamanistic ritual ceremonies of ancestor worship to gradually develop into a full set of social norms, order, requirements, and customs that maintained the survival and development of the clan or tribe. (Li 2018, 32)

In other words, behind the word virtue we can first find unwritten regulations, which by the time of Duke of Zhou became comprehensively established as institutionalized clan-tribe-state norms of ritual and music. The "virtuous governance" (*dezheng* 德政) of institutionalized ritual and music can be divided into the internal aspect, i.e. reverence, and the external aspect, i.e. ritual, according to Li. The concept of reverence originated in shamanistic ritual ceremony and, according to Li, was the very definition of the ecstatic psychological state of shamanistic activities (ibid., 32). Here Li actually quotes Xu Fuguan's definition of respect:

> The notion of reverence emphasized in the early Zhou period seems similar to but in fact differs in nature from religious piety. Religious piety involves people dispelling their own subjectivity, casting themselves before the divine and thoroughly submitting themselves psychologically to the divine. Reverence as stressed in the early Zhou period involved human spirit. It moved people from a state of dispersal to one of concentration, dispelling one's own sensory desires before the responsibilities one has undertaken, which accentuas the functions of one's subjective agency and rationality.[11] (Xu 2014, 22)

Li explains that reverence includes not only awe and respect, but also fear, adoration and worship. He agrees with Xu that reverence in classical Confucianism does not negate the self in order to subjugate the human to the divine. Li believes that this is due to the way reverence arose in shamanism. Not through a deification of objectified spirits, but rather through an emotional experience of the union of the human and divine. In this way, a concept of a transcendent god never emerged, while the psychological state of reverence was slowly transformed into behavioral norms (Li 2018, 32). Li explains that the evolution from shamanism to ritual regulations was an extremely long process in which dance, music, ceremony, and sacrificial worship gradually transformed into behavioral norms. This process extended from the time of the "three sovereigns and five emperors" (*san huang wu di* 三皇五帝) to the early Zhou period, when the Duke of Zhou finally institutionalized ritual regulations and music (ibid., 54–55). Through rituals, Heaven was able to maintain the sacred, while at the same time connoting a sense of normativity (Deng 2018, VII–VIII). Li links the emergence of the concept of ritual to the concept of ceremony or etiquette (*yi* 仪). Originally, both "ceremony" and "ritual" were a part of shamanistic dance and music. Li argues that ceremony could also originally refer to a type of legal institution or obligation (*yi* 义) that related to rituals and manners that achieved their appropriateness.

> Through shamanistic ritual ceremony, "obligation" became the unwritten laws, conceptions of justice, and especially obligations that primeval communities had to abide by and carry out. (Li 2018, 62)

We see this in sayings such as "Ritual follows appropriateness"[12] (Li ji, Qu Li Shang, 5). Through the systematization, completion, and formalization of ritual, shamanism gradually developed into institutions, reaching its final stage with the Duke of

11 Trans. Robert A. Carleo III in Li 2018, 33.

12 礼从宜。

Zhou, who institutionalized ritual regulations and music, and finally with Confucius, who rooted them in humaneness (ibid.). Finally, Li connects the idea of sacredness not only to religious faith, but also to aestheitic enjoyment, which I mentioned earlier when discussing the *culture of joy* or the culture of music and aesthetics. In Li's interpretation, people always strive for emotional grounding and liberation. In the case of the Chinese tradition, however, this liberation was sought not through religious faith but through aesthetic enjoyment (Deng 2018, X–XI). Li believes that aesthetics is both the beginning and end point of humans, and that aesthetics actually transcends ethics. He sees this confirmed in the Chinese tradition's ideas of "establishing oneself through ritual" (*li yu li* 立于礼), but then moving toward aesthetics and finding "completion through music" (*cheng yu yue* 成于乐) (ibid., XII).

Conclusion

The contrastive analysis of Xu Fuguan's and Li Zehou's theories of the origin and transformation of the earliest Chinese religious and moral concepts in the period of the transition from Shang to the Western Zhou dynastyies presented in this article shows many parallels between their interpretations. The differences among them, however, originate in their different understanding and contextualization of religious belief in the pre-Zhou period of Chinese history.

Xu holds that the Shang dynasty was dominated by the idea of Shang Di, which indicates the complete submission of people to the will of the gods. According to him, this period was characterized by fear and terror of natural disasters and calamities, but there was still no sense of of a peron's own responsibility or human agency, which remained unchanged until the Zhou dynasty. On the other hand, we can see that based on Li's analysis this process of acquiring self-awareness began much earlier. In his opinion, early the Xia and Shang dynasties' shamanistic ceremonies played an extremely important role in this process, because in them the interaction with the spirits was already proactive and not passive, as in many other religious traditions. Li argues that as part of the heritage of ancestor worship human beings could not fully comprehend the boundaries between the world of humans and that of spirits, which enabled them to search for meaning and a better future through their own efforts. In shamanism, human agency within the engagement with the divine was highly pronounced. The existence of the spirits was not separate from the activities of humans, for the spirits did not possess a self-sufficient transcendent or transcendental existence. The shamanistic ceremony, which originated in the earliest times, was thus not a passive supplication, but an active attempt to influence the spirits.

Xu's textual analysis shows a different interpretation of early religious concepts, mainly because Xu operates with them in the context of the dualism between religion and humanism. Xu highlights the connection between the Mandate of Heaven and the morality of rulers. It was the fusion of religion with humanistic moral values and human subjectivity that allowed for the development of a higher form of religion. However, with the decline of the government's morality during the Western Zhou, religion and humanism lost their balance and tilted in favour of the latter. Consequently, the religious concepts of the early Zhou lost all meaning, Xu believes, and the Chinese culture entered the realm of humanism and ethics. Concepts such as reverence and virtue, which spring from the human heart and imply moral standards, gradually became the complete reflection of the spirit of humanism, which for the first time illuminated the value of human existence and shaped the future development of Chinese culture and politics, concludes Xu. Li, on the other hand, believes that Chinese culture never even strived for psychological and spiritual freedom in religious faith, so in Zhou times they did not strive for a liberalization from it either. On the contrary, their search was directed towards ethics and aesthetic enjoyment. However, Li's interpretation here is based on Li's own elaboration of the idea that the cultivation of human emotion was equated with the understanding of music in ritual in ancient China. In his view, the institutionalization of music and ritual in the Zhou dynasty actually represented only a formalization and rationalization of a system of rules and ethics that maintained social order for centuries by guiding people with norms. Li believes that aesthetics eventually transcended ethics in Chinese culture, as evidenced by ideas such as "to establish [oneself] through ritual" but then finding "completion through music".

Xu's main claim is that it was only the Zhou people who brought the previous culture based on material achievements into the realm of ideas, and through awareness of their own subjectivity and responsibility they developed a sense of *concerned consciousness.* While Xu emphasizes that the Zhou dynasty did not emerge in isolation from the Shang, and sets out how the former adopted much of the latter's ideational tradition, his leap from the complete absence of self-consciousness to its emergence with the very first (posthumously crowned) King Wen of Zhou seems rather abrupt. On the other hand, Li's entire interpretation derives much less from a solid hermeneutical analysis of classical sources, and leans much more on his own theories and ideas developed based on later interpretations of Chinese history. Even though Li's analysis of the classical sources from which his theory of the shamanistic-historical tradition emerged is less solid, it seems that within his own theorethical system Li manages to develop his ideas in a more gradual way than Xu. Li's idea of the interconecction

between human subjectality and the *culture of joy* here seems at first quite the opposite to Xu's idea of connecting human self-awerness with the *concerned consciousness*. Li believes that Chinese culture has always been based on the belief in only one world, therefore it never developed a transcendental world, and consequently the Way of Heaven and the Way of Humans have always been inseparable. This, according to Li, filled people with optimism and joy in their search for ethical interpersonal relationships and aesthetic enjoyment. Human agency has thus also always been clearly pronounced in concepts such as Heaven, Mandate of Heaven, and so on, as they were never pushed into any higher transcendental realm. However, Li also argues that the the fact that the Chinese people did not have faith in any higher realm actually made their struggle and hardship much greater than those of others. As we have seen Li describes this as "the forced smile of its "culture of optimism" and [the] profundity of its deep sorrow", which finally gives the impression that Li's and Xu's ideas here might not be as opposed as they seem at first sight.

Since both authors base their research on the interpretation of classical works, the concepts the put forward are similar. However, the difference lies in the different contextualization of the emergence of these concepts and the meaning they had for the people of the period under study, as well as within different theoretical and methodological approaches of the authors. By comparing Li Zehou and Xu Fuguan, this article has attempted to bring Li's philosophical interpretation of the origins of Chinese culture into dialogue with Xu's theory based on intellectual history and linguistic analysis. Within their own frameworks, both authors have explored the same concepts but have reached different conclusions. While Xu takes his analysis of the humanization of religion through the concept of *concerned consciousness* and ends in the realm of ethics and moral philosophy, also building a connection towards his political theory, Li uses a different approach which takes him from the process of rationalization of shamanistic practices, through the *culture of joy* and through ethics and into the realm of aesthetics. I argue that their analyses are very similar in content, and that the major difference between them lies in their argumentation and contextualization of the emergence of the self-awerness and human agency, and in the way they connect this to the emergence of the key concepts of Confucian ethics, Xu's political theory and Li's aesthetic theory. However, these mutual differences, which originate in their different methodological approaches, form an interesting mutual complementarity, which in turn opens up a deeper multilayered understanding of the process of the humanization of Chinese religion and its possible influences on the formation of a Chinese culture marked with both optimism and concern.

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A Humanist Reading of Wang Chong's Defence of Divination

*Mark Kevin CABURAL**

Abstract

In this article, I present a new perspective on the thought of Wang Chong (王充, 27 CE – ca 97 CE) by drawing on Chung-Ying Cheng's understanding of inclusive or intrinsic humanism. Specifically, I show how this type of humanism is reflected in Wang's defence of divination and how his reinterpretation of the concepts of spontaneity (*ziran* 自然), endowment (*ming* 命), and natural disposition (*xing* 性) provide insights into the capabilities, concerns, and role of humans in the universe. Additionally, I describe the importance of ontocosmological humility in divination and inclusive humanism, then discuss how such a disposition or virtue figures in the modern scientific literature. While I offer a humanist reading of Wang's defence of divination in this article, I also argue that ontocosmological humility can guide humans in making responsible actions and transforming themselves, other creatures, and the universe.

Keywords: Wang Chong, divination, humanism, inclusive humanism, ontocosmological humility

Humanistično branje Wang Chongovega zagovarjanja vedeževanja

Izvleček

V prispevku predstavim nov pogled na misel Wang Chonga (王充, 27–97), pri čemer se opiram na Cheng Chung Yingovo razumevanje vključujočega ali imanentnega humanizma. Še posebej prikažem, kako se ta vrsta humanizma odraža v Wangovem zagovarjanju vedeževanja in kako njegova reinterpretacija konceptov pristnosti (*ziran* 自然), usode (*ming* 命) in naravne dispozicije (*xing* 性) ponudi vpogled v sposobnosti, skrbi in vlogo človeka v univerzumu. Hkrati prikažem tudi pomembnost ontokozmološke skromnosti v vedeževanju in vključujočem humanizmu ter razpravljam, kako se tovrstna dispozicija ali vrline pojavljajo v sodobni znanstveni literaturi. Medtem ko v prispevku podajam humanistično branje Wangovega zagovarjanja vedeževanja, trdim tudi, da lahko ontokozmološka skromnost usmerja človeka pri odgovornih dejanjih ter preoblikovanju samega sebe, drugih bitij in celotnega univerzuma.

Ključne besede: Wang Chong, vedeževanje, humanizem, vključujoči humanizem, ontokozmološka skromnost

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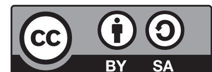

Introduction

Humanism generally emphasizes human capabilities, interests, and concerns, which are identified by their place, role, or position in the universe. According to Chung-Ying Cheng (1972, 158–59; 1998, 211–13), there are two types of humanism. The first, called exclusive humanism, affirms the superiority and central position of humans in the universe. This type is prevalent in Western philosophy and may also be referred to as extrinsic humanism, human-centred rationalism, anthropological egoism, or human chauvinism. The second type, inclusive or intrinsic humanism, suggests the coordinating or harmonizing power of humanity. Humans do not hold a central position but share roles with other creatures in the universe, and Chinese philosophy predominantly embraces this type of humanism. In one of his works, Cheng (1998) explores the inclusive humanism present in Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism and examines its relationship to environmental problems.[1]

In this article, I explore the thought of Wang Chong (王充, 27 CE–ca 97 CE), an important thinker during the Eastern Han dynasty. I show that inclusive or intrinsic humanism is also reflected in his collection of writings: the *Lunheng* (論衡).[2] More specifically, I emphasize Wang's defence of divination, one of the instances where he deals with and rectifies the concerns or practices of his society.[3] In this defence, he offers an interpretation of spontaneity (*ziran* 自然), and endowment (*ming* 命) in relation to natural disposition (*xing* 性). These concepts are not only meaningful in his defence of divination, but they are also helpful in reflecting on the place of humans in the universe. Moreover, I describe the importance of ontocosmological humility in divination and inclusive humanism, then discuss how such a disposition or virtue figures in modern scientific literature. In brief, as I offer a humanist reading of Wang's defence of divination in order to rethink the role or position of humans in the universe, I also argue that ontocosmological humility can guide humans in making responsible actions and transforming themselves, other creatures, and the universe. This article is divided into the following sections: "Divination and Humanism"; "Ziran: The Equality of

1 Cheng (1998) argues that exclusive humanism has detrimental effects on the environment while inclusive humanism provides an alternative in the context of environmental problems. Through his exploration of inclusive humanism in Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, Cheng seeks to articulate a cosmo-eco-ethics or a cosmo-ethics that is at the same time an ecological cosmology.

2 Alfred Forke (1907; 1962) translated this surviving work of Wang into English. For citation purposes, I abbreviate it as *LH*. I also cite it according to the arrangement of the translator. Since there are two parts or volumes of the translation, I will indicate the part. Hence, *LH* I or II: page number/s.

3 In addition to his defence, Wang also expressed criticisms of divination (see Cabural 2023).

Things and its Role in Divination"; "Ming, Xing, and Transformation"; and "Humility in Divination, Inclusive Humanism, and Modern Science".

Divination and Humanism

Lisa Raphals (2013, 1) defines divination as "a deliberate search for understanding of the hidden significance of events in the future, present, or past". Wang's writings about some forms of divination—the use of milfoil stalks, the use of shells of tortoises, anthroposcopy or physiognomy, and the appearance of omens or portents—fit within this definition.[4] Firstly, Wang acknowledges that humans deliberately search for omens and other signs, but he also recognizes the limitations of human knowledge, which can lead to misinterpretation of these signs (*LH* I: 189). And secondly, he emphasizes that the uniqueness of omens is dependent on time, meaning that omens from the past may not be the same as those in the present or future (*LH* II: 192–200). Raphals's definition is notable for including all aspects of time, i.e., the past, present, and future, representing a significant departure from the typical view that divination is only concerned with predicting future events (e.g., Cicero *De Divinatione Book I*, par. 1).[5]

In the past, divination was a crucial practice for the ancients, serving as a means to navigate both personal and public (or socio-politico-religious) concerns. Personal concerns, for instance, include knowing about one's individual endowment, such as the duration of one's life and physical strength, whether one will be successful in a career and be wealthy, or one's status in society (*LH* I: 144).[6] With regard to public concerns, a well-known example is when the Zhou Dynasty justified their decision to overthrow the Shang Dynasty by invoking the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming* 天命). The rulers of Zhou discovered the Mandate through the process of divination by interpreting natural signs. As a rule, if Heaven approves of the government, it manifests in nature's harmony and peace; if Heaven disapproves, it is expressed through anomalies and natural disasters (Smith 1991, 18). These examples illustrate how divination played a critical role in both personal and public concerns, implying that this practice is relevant to the discourse on humanism.

4 In my previous works on Wang, I discussed the absence of a unifying term to describe these practices. In other words, he did not employ a term that can be neatly translated as divination (Cabural 2020, 10; 2023, 2).

5 This important work of Cicero entitled *De Divinatione* (*On Divination*) is composed of two books, and I use the translation by William Armistead Falconer published in the Loeb Classical Library series. I will indicate the book number and the paragraph (par.) number instead of the pages.

6 It is important to note here that Wang also discussed the destiny or decree of the state, which is different from personal or individual endowment (*LH* I: 137).

Divination offered guidance on how to live, revealed what was within and beyond human control, and shed light on the place of humans in the universe.

Divination posits the important connection between cosmology and ethics. This connection is at the core of Cheng's discussion of cosmo-ethics as the ethics of inclusive humanism. According to him (Cheng 1998, 216), cosmo-ethics "means that, as humans, we must think, act, plan, and decide with this vision of present and future harmony of nature always in mind". Cosmology is the study of the universe, including its origin, possible forces that govern it, and the creatures or entities that reside or constitute the universe. Simply put, cosmology identifies the condition and mechanism of the place where humans are part of and where they reside. Ethics focuses on how humans should adapt to and live according to the conditions and mechanisms identified in the study of the universe. Divination, in general, proceeds from the cosmological understanding that there exists a higher power or authority than humans, such as God, Heaven, the universe, fate or endowment, or chance. Divination thus opposes the human-centeredness of exclusive humanism as it acknowledges that humans are not the sole masters of their lives and the universe.

Wang's understanding of divination differs from the commonly held belief before and during his time, which anthropomorphized or attributed human characteristics to Heaven. Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, 179 BCE–104 BCE), a Western Han dynasty thinker and also the proponent of the notion of the unity between Heaven and humanity (*tianrenheyi* 天人合一), held this view. According to Dong, Heaven is the origin, supreme ancestor, and the source of the humanness of humans, and since this is the case, "human beings are elevated to be categorized with Heaven" (Dong 2016, 363). As a result, humans were considered outstanding and favoured more than any other creatures in the universe. The unity or interaction between Heaven and humanity was fundamental to Dong's understanding of divination, where Heaven communicated messages to humans, and humans (especially the sage-ruler) could interpret these in the form of natural disasters and bizarre events (ibid., 322).

Wang, who is critical of the anthropomorphized interpretation of Heaven and how it is commonly used to explain divination (see *LH* I: 92, 182–83), suggests and reinterprets the concept of spontaneity as a fundamental cosmological principle or the principle of Heaven. This concept is also integral to his understanding of divination. For instance, Wang views individual endowment as spontaneously generated and asserts that it can be known through some forms of divination by means of inspecting one's physical appearance or the structure of the bones (*LH* I: 130–38, 304–12). Moreover, the ethical significance of the cosmological principle

of spontaneity and the concept of endowment is noteworthy, as they challenge prevalent ethical notions such as freedom, fatalism, and determinism. These points will be further examined in the succeeding parts of this article. Consistent with the principle of spontaneity or the spontaneous generation of things, Wang emphasizes that humans are part of a single larger whole, stating "that man is created as one of the ten thousand creatures" (*LH* I: 202). This point also suggests that humans have fundamental similarities with other creatures, and Wang notes that they share common natural processes and inhabit the same environment. As the text states, a "man has birth and death, and so other creatures have a beginning and an end. He is active, and so other creatures have their work likewise…They have the same Heaven, the same Earth, and they look equally up at the sun and the moon" (*LH* I: 528). To summarize, the cosmological principle of spontaneity, which places humans among other creatures, can provide a basis for understanding how humans ought to live and conduct themselves within the universe and how they should regard other creatures.

The main difference between Dong and Wang lies in their conception of Heaven, which fashioned their views of humans, divination, and so on. Nevertheless, both theories can be viewed as forms of inclusive humanism. It can be argued that inclusive humanism is particularly evident in the concept of *tianrenheyi*, which explicitly acknowledges the unity between Heaven and humanity and implies the potential of humans to harmonize with the universe—a fundamental aspect of inclusive humanism (Cheng 1998, 222). The idea that Heaven sends messages to humans is also a clear indication of divination. However, I would like to point out that despite the lack of an anthropomorphized conception of Heaven and the potential categorization of humans with it, divination and inclusive humanism are still feasible, as in the case of Wang. This means that humans can still interpret various signs through different forms of divination, although these signs do not necessarily or directly originate from Heaven. Humans can also live in harmony with the spontaneous Heaven and other creatures. The succeeding parts of this article will clarify these points.

Ziran: The Equality of Things and Its Role in Divination

The *Lunheng* contains one significant chapter titled *Ziran*, devoted solely to explaining this concept (*LH* I: 92–102). In addition, there are various allusions to *ziran* or spontaneity in other chapters of the same volume, indicating its crucial role in the philosophical thought of Wang (Wang, Bao and Guan 2020, 233; The editorial board of *Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture* 2015, 129–30). In

his understanding, *ziran* is the principle of Heaven and is fundamental in explaining the mechanism of the universe. Heaven is the origin of things or the spontaneous natural agent (McLeod 2018, 186). However, the term agent as employed here does not imply that Heaven has an intention or care for humans, things, and other creatures, but instead refers to its indispensable role in accordance with the principle of spontaneity. In fact, this conception of Heaven as spontaneous lies at the core of Wang's arguments against the notion of an anthropomorphized Heaven and divination.

By incorporating the concept of *qi* (氣), Wang interprets *ziran* as *qi*-transformation (Wang, Bao and Guan 2020, 234).[7] There are various meanings and kinds of *qi*, but in this context it refers to the principal *qi* (*yuan qi* 元氣), which was introduced by Dong. This principal *qi* is regarded as "the original substance (*wuzhi* 物質) for the creation of the universe" (ibid., 180; also see Fung 1953, 19–20). Wang views principal *qi* as the origin of things and describes it as "placid, tranquil, desireless, inactive, and unbusied" (*LH* I: 93). According to him, "by the fusion of the [*qi*] of Heaven [*tian*] and Earth [*di*] all things of the world are produced spontaneously [*ziran*], just as by the mixture of the [*qi*] of husband and wife children are born spontaneously" (*LH* I: 92). As mentioned in the preceding part, this generation process also includes humans (*LH* I: 202).

My main emphasis on the principle of *ziran* is the equality of things. Here, I follow Aristotle's distinction of numerical and proportional equality (Aristotle 2001, 1130b-1132b; also see Li 2012, 196–297). Numerical equality proceeds from a non-discriminatory standpoint, which means that it does not pay attention to the circumstances or factors of the parties involved. It contrasts with proportional equality, which takes into account individual circumstances or factors. Notably, Chenyang Li (2012, 297–301) identifies two instances of numerical equality in the context of Confucian ethics. The first pertains to the equal capacity of humans for moral cultivation, while the second refers to the equality that exists in social roles, meaning that all humans are accountable or have responsibilities to fulfil. For Wang the equality of things is an example of numerical equality, which can be called ontocosmological equality, and has ethical significance.[8] Ontocosmological equality refers to the idea that all creatures, regardless of their size, species, or status, are equally subject to the same process of generation and degeneration and share the same natural environment (for example, see *LH* I: 92, 202, 528). This is

7 *Qi* is one of the most important concepts in Chinese philosophy, "referring to the refined and miniscule elements which constitute the myriad things of Heaven and Earth" (Wang, Bao and Guan 2020, 177).

8 I borrow the term ontocosmology from Cheng (1998, 217). It refers to the interrelatedness of the natures of the universe and the human being.

one of the instances where we can recognize the in-between-ness or among-ness of humans, as they are both among and one with other creatures in the universe because of their fundamental similarities.

The ethical significance of this ontocosmological equality is that humans must recognize the fundamental similarities among all creatures and use this as a basis for relating to them. Environmental and ecological problems have arisen because humans have failed to understand their similarities and interconnectedness with other creatures. This is evident in cases where scientific and technological advancements, thought to be beneficial for humans, have had adverse effects on other creatures. Additionally, the misuse or abuse of other things or creatures, such as trees and vegetation, which are not merely resources for human use but vital components of the universe and essential for the existence of diverse forms of life, is a related concern. Practices like deforestation have far-reaching effects that ultimately impact human lives. To relate to other generated things or creatures, humans must recognize and affirm their intrinsic value. As Cheng (1998, 215) argues in the context of inclusive humanism, "each and every thing has an intrinsic value, value in the sense of being able to form a mutually enriching or mutually strengthening relationship among things contributing to the total unity and harmony among things in reality".

Ziran is a fundamental concept in Wang's defence of divination. Divinatory signs, like other things or creatures, are spontaneously generated. This means that signs are not sent by Heaven and are not expressions or indications of its interest or care for humans and their undertakings. To clarify this point, let us examine omens or portents, which are spontaneous and natural. In this context, the terms "spontaneous" and "natural" are practically interchangeable, as they may both refer to one and the same thing. However, what is worth noting is how the term "natural" is contrasted with the term "artificial". According to Wang (*LH* I: 97), a dummy or replica is not spontaneously generated, but rather it is artificial because it is purposefully created by humans, making it vulnerable or easily destructible. In contrast, omens are natural and cannot be easily destroyed. In fact, they are inherently natural since humans cannot create them on purpose—they are spontaneously generated. This contrast between artificial and natural partly explains why Wang (*LH* I: 183) criticizes other forms of divination, such as the use of bones of animals and the use of stalks, because they are done artificially or are induced deliberately by human practitioners. To further illustrate that omens (i.e., the signs of auspicious and inauspicious events) are natural, Wang presents an analogy, describing them as similar to the flushed colour on a human face. He (*LH* I: 102) states:

> … [the signs of] auspicious and inauspicious events are like the flushed colour appearing on the face. Man cannot produce it, the colour comes out of itself. Heaven and Earth are like the human body, the transformation of their [*qi*], like the flushed colour. How can Heaven and Earth cause the sudden change of their [*qi*], since man cannot produce the flushed colour? The change of the [*qi*] is spontaneous, it appears of itself, as the colour comes out of itself.

This passage describes how omens are understood in terms of the concept of *qi*--transformation, which affirms that they are spontaneously generated. It is noteworthy that Wang differs from the Literati's view that omens must be standardized, meaning that the same omens that appeared in the past should appear in the present to indicate or signify a period of universal peace (*taiping* 太平) (*LH Part II*, 192). He argues against this view by emphasizing the unique and unusual nature of spontaneously generated omens, stating that they need not be identical (*LH* II: 195–96). Furthermore, since omens are spontaneously generated, Wang (*LH* II: 315) asserts that "ominous things partly exist and partly do not exist". As we consider inclusive humanism in this article, it is relevant to ask whether divinatory signs, such as omens or portents, possess intrinsic value. To respond to this question, it is important to recall how Wang describes omens in relation to universal peace. In his words (*LH* II: 192–93):

> Universal peace manifests itself by the establishment of the government, when the people respond, by being cheerful and at ease…The people being at ease, the Yin and the Yang are in harmony, and when they harmonize all things grow and develop such being the case, strange omens come forth…Being at ease, it is at peace, and then even the absence of omens would not be hurtful to the peaceful state…Sometimes all may be in perfect order, but there are no witnesses to prove it...A wise ruler in his administration aims at universal peace, and it is not indispensable that there should be corresponding omens.

What is implied here is the unnecessary role of omens or divination in general (Cabural 2023, 11–12). This, however, did not hinder Wang from discussing such a topic since, according to him, "though of no great importance, these arts are also derived from the sages, which has often been overlooked" (*LH* II: 104). His intention is to rectify misconceptions or misinterpretations rather than deny the possibility of omens or divination. In a state of universal peace, omens and other unusual creatures are not necessary to achieve such a state. In fact, they are derivative; they just appear when such a state has been achieved. While universal peace

may generate omens, it is not the case that omens may generate universal peace. In this regard, omens, essentially signs or signals, do not have intrinsic value. Broadly speaking, signs do not have intrinsic value since they point to something else, which may suggest their value is instrumental. However, from the point of view of inclusive humanism, omens have intrinsic value since they are spontaneously generated and can aid in understanding the state of things, even though they serve an instrumental purpose. They may not constantly be present, but omens are meaningful when they exist. While it is also true that omens are not necessary to achieve harmony or universal peace, they are not entirely negligible because their presence or absence can affect the interpretation of events and the state of society. When humans disagree about the nature and meaning of omens, it may yield confusion. This is the very historical context of Wang, where there is confusion or disagreement about whether their period achieved a state of universal peace. Consequently, this issue affected how their sovereigns and sages were perceived (*LH* II: 192–200; Puett 2005/2006, 275; Raphals 2012).

An important component of Wang's defence of divination and repudiation of an anthropomorphized conception of Heaven is his assertion about the difference between Heaven and humanity. According to him, unlike humans with sensory organs enabling them to develop desires, Heaven is without purpose or desire (*LH* I: 92–93). This is the reason why Heaven – being spontaneous, incorporeal, and without purpose and desire – cannot respond to the wishes of humans, which is thought to be possible in the practice of divination by milfoil and tortoises. Moreover, this difference does not deny the possibility of unity or harmony between Heaven and humanity, which indicates inclusive humanism (Cheng 1998, 222). Wang argues that "a man with the highest, purest, and fullest virtue has been endowed with a large quantity of [*qi*], therefore he can follow the example of Heaven, and be spontaneous and inactive like it" (*LH* I: 97). Here, Wang refers to sovereign or sage rulers as people who are endowed with a generous amount of *qi*. He considers them as the necessary and sufficient condition to achieve universal peace, as they can effectively interpret omens and other signs due to their effective use of analogies and retrospective or holistic thinking (*LH* II: 117; also see Puett, 2005/2006, 274). It is, therefore, through the sovereign or sage rulers that the unity between Heaven and humanity becomes possible. It is worth noting that although Wang's views are opposed to Dong in various ways, both thinkers agree on the importance of the sovereign or sage rulers in the unity or harmony between Heaven and humanity. As Dong (2016, 399) states, "when the ancients invented writing, they drew three [horizontal] lines that they connected through the centre [by a vertical stroke] and called this 'king.' These three lines represent Heaven, Earth, and humankind, and the line that connects them through the centre unifies their Way".

Ming, *Xing*, and Transformation

Wang's understanding of *ziran* and repudiation of the anthropomorphized conception of Heaven shape his interpretation of *ming* or endowment as devoid of "any sense of divine demands" (Cai 2005, 180). In its early usage, *ming* meant mandate and was somewhat synonymous with *ling* (令 command), which denotes Heaven as the source of mandate or command, implying the Mandate of Heaven (Wang, Bao and Guan 2020, 45). However, for Wang, Heaven is not the source of *ming* since it is essentially without intention or desire and operates according to *ziran*. This suggests that *ming* is spontaneously generated like other things or creatures (*LH* I: 130). While the concept of *ming* contains politico-religious significance and Wang also refers in passing to the destiny or decree of the state, I intend to emphasize his insight into individual endowment, which is crucial to his understanding of humans (*LH* I: 137). Contrary to the common view that the concept of endowment is simply tantamount to fatalism and determinism, we can read in Wang that there is still room for human capabilities and transformation, as humans have the ability to affect change in themselves and other things around them.

One striking aspect of Wang's interpretation of *ming* is that it is embedded in the human body and in *xing* or natural disposition (Raphals 2003, 551).[9] With regard to the embeddedness of *ming* in the human body, it has been stated that a "man shows by his appearance, whether he will die old or young, and there are signs indicating, whether he will be rich or poor, high-placed or base. All this is to be seen from his body" (*LH* I: 137). This passage presents two types of *ming*—the first pertains to social status and wealth or fortune, and the second refers to the span or duration of one's life (see also *LH* I: 144 and 313). It is in this regard that the question of whether Wang promoted fatalism or the existence of predetermined events which are immutable arises (see discussion of Song 2018, 170). Arguably, he may not have been considered as promoting fatalism if he just referred to the duration of life because there can be signs that can inform us about it, and to live a short or long time is also a fact of being human. The issue, however, becomes more complicated if we think about how bodily signs are interpreted in relation to the duration of life. There may be instances where there is no logical or direct connection between the sign and the interpretation, such as by determining the duration of life according to ear length or lines on the palm. But there can also be instances

9 Raphals, alluding to how *ming* is discussed in the *Lunheng*, identifies three innovations. According to her (Raphals 2003, 551), "innovations in the *Lunheng* discussion of *ming* focus on clusters of terms: the interrelations of *ming* and the opportune moment (*shi*), the embedding of *ming* in inner nature (*xing*) and the visible body (*ti*), and a new distinction between luck and chance".

wherein signs are logically explained or directly connected to the duration of one's life. For instance, when medical doctors predict the lifespans of patients due to their conditions, although they are not always guaranteed. Here, it is important to note that medical science during Wang's time was not as advanced as what we have today. For example, when diseases or abnormal signs appeared, people might just have accepted them and simply conjectured the number of days a person was expected to live. But now there are various ways to deal with diseases to prolong life. We also have more compelling reasons to explain the relationship between diseases or bodily signs and the duration of life. Wang's inclusion of endowment in terms of wealth and honour could be seen as promoting fatalism. However, this contradicts reality since there are many examples of people who have risen from unfortunate circumstances through dedication and determination.

With regard to the embeddedness of *ming* in *xing* or disposition, these aspects of human life are both obtained at birth, but this does not mean that they must correspond to each other.[10] According to Wang, "[one's] disposition may be good, but his [endowment] unlucky, or his disposition bad, and his [endowment] lucky. Good and bad actions are the result of natural disposition, happiness and misfortune, good and bad luck are [endowment]" (*LH* I: 139). Their non-correspondence refers to the absence of causal relation between human action and happiness or the feeling of misery. This seems reasonable, since it does not follow that when humans face unfortunate endowments such as short duration of life or low ranks in society that these are outcomes of their bad conduct. Likewise, it does not follow that a fortunate endowment results from good conduct. There are indeed instances of humans with a good disposition, yet they lived a short but meaningful life. Meanwhile, it is interesting to relate this point to Wang's criticism of wrong views about natural occurrences. During his time, it was a common understanding that when a man was killed by lighting, it was because of his hidden faults, and the deep rolling sound of thunder is a manifestation of the anger of Heaven which is akin to the gasping and breathing of humans when they are angry. Wang (*LH*

10 The relationship between *ming* and *xing* was considered prior to Wang. Notably, Mencius (*Mengzi* 7B24) states: "The mouth in relation to flavours, the eyes in relation to sights, the ears in relation to notes, the nose in relation to odours, the four limbs in relation to comfort—these are matters of human nature, but they are also fated. Nonetheless, a gentleman does not refer to them as human nature. Benevolence between father and son, righteousness between ruler and minister, propriety between guest and host, wisdom in relation to the worthy, the sage in relation to the Way of Heaven—these are fated, but they also involve human nature. Nonetheless, a gentleman does not refer to them as fated." Here, Mencius highlights two aspects of human life that do not correspond or are dissimilar, where one must simply be accepted, and the other requires cultivation. Although Wang may have differed in his examples of what falls under the purview of *ming* and *xing*, his thought also implies the presence of aspects of life that can simply be accepted, while others require capabilities, effort, or creativity.

I: 285–95) considers these as exaggerations, and in response provides naturalistic explanations to show that thunder is fire, devoid of any supernatural causes or agents, and it is not an expression of the anger of Heaven.

Thus far, we have explored how Wang viewed endowment in relation to human life and briefly touched on the question of whether he advocated for fatalism. However, the lingering question is how human capabilities fit into this framework. The presupposition here is that in affirming endowment, Wang only showed the areas where humans are helpless, but did not intend to promote radical fatalism. Therefore, I propose the importance of contentment, where humans must learn to live within the boundaries of their endowment and accept the limitations of their lives. Although we may not fully agree with Wang's interpretation of *ming*, we can draw corresponding analogies or parallel experiences to make sense of this concept. For instance, there are areas of human existence that we cannot change, such as being born, dying, ageing, and so on. In such cases, we can only surrender to the processes and allow things to unfold. Contentment does not equate to settling for mediocrity. Rather, being contented or accepting these unchangeable areas of life can enable us to be more creative in managing the things we can control.

The issue of whether Wang promoted determinism may also be relevant in relation to the concept of *xing*, which suggests that human actions are determined or motivated by natural disposition. However, it appears that Wang's perspective aligns with that of *ming,* in which he did not promote radical determinism. As he states, "speaking of [natural disposition] one must distinguish good and bad characters; [while] the good ones are so of themselves, the wicked can be instructed and urged on to do good" (*LH* I: 374; also see *LH* I: 99). This passage implies that goodness must be the guiding principle for all humans, and those with good natural dispositions can serve as moral exemplars. In contrast, those with bad dispositions can be transformed through instruction, education, or influence from others. In sum, although natural disposition may lead to a sense of determinism, transformation is still possible, although requiring the sincere willingness of humans. A further remark deserves attention here regarding the non-correspondence between *xing* and *ming,* where there is no causal relation or guarantee between one's dispositions or actions and a favourable endowment or status in life. This means that no matter how good one's disposition is, one should not expect this to reap a favourable endowment, otherwise one may end up feeling miserable. Therefore, humans should strive to do good for its own sake without expecting anything in return, which exemplifies a high moral character.

Inclusive humanism, as Cheng (1998, 215) states, "is a view of the human as a creative process of self-fulfilment of reality, in reality, for reality, and from reality".

This aligns with the idea that the transformation towards goodness, as discussed earlier, is a manifestation of this creative process of self-fulfilment. While *ming* and *xing* are spontaneously generated and rooted in or from reality, humans have the power to transform or make sense of these two aspects of life. Moreover, humans have roles in the transformation of things, which indicates that they are part of the transformation of reality. As Wang puts it, "in spite of spontaneity [*ziran*] there may be activity for a while in support of it. Ploughing, tilling, weeding, and sowing in Spring are human actions. But as soon as the grain has entered the soil, it begins growing by day and night" (*LH* I: 97). Despite the primacy of *ziran* in most processes, human support is important. It is thus important for humans to evaluate if their activities to support such processes are appropriate, which is possible if there is a sufficient understanding of nature. Additionally, the concept of proportional equality is relevant to this context. While humans and other things or creatures are equal in the numerical or ontocosmological sense, humans are superior in some respects. This superiority, however, entails their responsibility which is why human activities must lead to the transformation rather than the destruction of things and reality at large.

Moreover, the embeddedness of *ming* in the human body implies the possibility of anthroposcopy (*guxiang* 骨相; see *LH* I: 304–12). In other words, if endowment is not discernible in the human body, then there is no basis for the practice of anthroposcopy, a form of divination that proceeds from the inspection or examination of bone structures to arrive at a knowledge of one's endowment. Physiognomy, a more common form of divination that involves assessing personality and endowment based on bodily features or examining certain body parts, shares some similarities with anthroposcopy.[11] On a related note, it is striking that Wang seems inconsistent in some of his remarks regarding the intelligibility of endowment. In one instance, he states that knowing endowment is an easy process (*LH* I: 304). But he contradicts this in other places wherein he describes it as a difficult process (*LH* I: 149, 311). Despite this inconsistency, it is evident that Wang believes in the possibility of knowing one's endowment.

Given that it is possible, one may question the importance of knowing endowment. There can be several responses, such as to aid in making decisions about whether one still needs to work hard and whether one's efforts will reap something good in the future, to get rid of future disappointment, and to overcome the fear of anxiety or even excitement. I describe these responses as indolent, lazy, or even cowardly

11 Wang refers to Mencius's assessment of the goodness of human beings based on eye physiognomy. Wang states: "*Mencius* judges [humans] by the pupils of their eyes. If the heart be bright, says he, the pupils are clear, if it be dark, the pupils are dim." (*LH* I: 385). The complete text is found in *Mengzi* 4A15.

since the motive behind knowing endowment stems from a reluctance to exert effort or take risks. But for Wang—and here I agree with the claim of Zong-qi Cai (2005, 181)—"to 'know *ming*' simply means knowing enough to be resigned to whatever life one is born to live". This means that knowing endowment requires acknowledging that there are things or events that must simply be accepted while also recognizing that there are things or events that can be changed or improved. Endowment shows the aspects of life that we must yield to, but we must likewise understand that there are aspects of life in which we must take active measures. Perhaps gaining knowledge of one's endowment allows for past events, no matter how painful or miserable, to become meaningful or at least bearable. It enables us to view present events with full understanding and appreciation and to anticipate the future with optimism and acceptance rather than abhorrence or anxiety.

Humility in Divination, Inclusive Humanism, and Modern Science

By humility, I mean the virtue or disposition that expels pride, which may hinder humans from understanding their roles, capabilities, and the universe at large. This understanding of humility is partly inspired by my reading of St. Thomas Aquinas, one of its well-known defenders. In the *Summa Theologiae*, he states that humility, "inasmuch as it expels pride, makes [humans] submissive and ever open to receive the influx of Divine grace".[12] Although his conception of humility is rooted in theology, I am intrigued by the relevance of Aquinas's understanding of the role of humility when transposed to a secular or more general context.[13] In this article, I replace "being open to Divine grace" with "being open to understanding that there are entities or forces more superior to humans" and "being open to accepting the equality of humans with other spontaneously generated beings alongside their outstanding status". Here, I employ the term ontocosmological humility to describe such openness since it pertains to being humble about the very being of humans and their belongingness or situatedness within the world or universe in which they and other creatures reside.

One of Wang's criticisms of divination pertains to the excessive reliance and trust placed by humans in the practice, causing them to disregard the advice of their

12 *ST* II-II, q.161, a.5, ad 2. This article uses the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. In citing *The Summa Theologiae*, I refer to the numbers of part, question, article, and objection. Hereafter, this source is cited as *ST* followed by the aforementioned details.

13 Here, I follow Andrew Charles Pinsent who affirms the validity of Aquinas's understanding of humility in a secular context. He (Pinsent 2021, 209) states, "it is proper and good for human persons to relate to other persons as second persons, and the damage to relationships from the species of pride, underline how humility is also valuable in a more general and secular sense".

friends (*LH* I: 182). Arguably, both divination and listening to friends require humility as they involve seeking guidance from "others" or external sources. In listening to friends, it is impossible to ask for advice if there is no humble admission that one needs it. To engage in the practice of divination, one must humbly recognize that there are entities or forces that are superior to humans, such as God, Heaven, the universe, fate or endowment, chance, and so on, and it is understood that these have some influence, authority, or control over humans. Without such humility and if one is self-assured to the extent of discounting those that are superior, there is no reason to engage in divination. Moreover, being humble can help people to acknowledge that certain things are beyond human control and that relying solely on human will is inadequate.

In order to demonstrate inclusive humanism in Confucianism, Cheng (1998, 222–23) describes the position of humans in the universe based on the ontocosmological worldview expressed in the *Xici zhuan* (繫辭傳). He states:

> … the human being is the most unique and outstanding third in the production of Heaven and Earth. Together with Heaven and Earth the human being forms a ternion, or triad, with the whole universe. The interesting thing about this ternion is that a human is capable of doing what Heaven and Earth do, namely, nourishing life and helping things to grow. But a human is not exactly Heaven or Earth, although he or she possesses the virtues of Heaven and Earth in order to achieve higher orders of value. It is in this sense that the human creations, such as culture and art, should be treasured as products of human creativity. But what humankind creates has to be conducive to the continuation of the natural course of Heaven and Earth, not detrimental to it … As a representative of Heaven-Earth, the human is not to conquer and exploit nature for his own comfort and private enjoyment because he has knowledge. It is rather this comprehensive knowledge that enables the human to care for other life-forms and to appreciate and protect nature.

This passage asserts the outstanding status of humans, which is also affirmed in the accounts of Dong and Wang. Dong's (2016, 363) concept of *tianrenheyi* posits this high status, as they can be potentially categorized with Heaven. Wang also elevates humans, claiming that: "in man, the mind of Heaven and Earth reach their highest development" (*LH* I: 529). Despite their outstanding status, humans maintain a sense of equality with other creatures. This is emphasized in Cheng's (1998, 215) inclusive humanism, which acknowledges the intrinsic value of all creatures in promoting harmony and unity. Wang's concept of *ziran* also implies

equality among all creatures, including humans, who are all subject to the same generation and degeneration processes (*LH* I: 528).

The misuse or abuse of the outstanding status of humans and their comprehensive knowledge can have harmful consequences. As Cheng highlights in the above passage, humans must utilize their knowledge and capabilities to benefit all life forms rather than causing destruction. This idea is reminiscent of Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer's (2000, 17) concept of the "Anthropocene", which emphasizes the impact of human activities on the environment. As they use this concept to describe the current geological epoch, Crutzen and Stoermer (2000, 18) also state that "to develop a world-wide accepted strategy leading to sustainability of ecosystems against human induced stresses will be one of the great future tasks of mankind". While human activities are inevitable, they must be carried out with responsibility and not at the expense of other elements or creatures in the universe. Moreover, engaging in irresponsible actions is an act of pride, as humans tend to neglect other creatures and prioritize their own benefit due to their outstanding status and comprehensive knowledge. Aquinas's description of pride is also analogous to such actions, as he states that "pride [superbia] is so called because a man thereby aims higher [supra] than he is" (*ST* II-II, q. 162, a. 1). Irresponsible actions can be considered acts of pride because humans engage in activities they are not meant to, which is analogous to humans aiming higher than they are. To put it briefly, humility is an essential virtue or disposition that humans must possess to refrain from misusing or abusing their outstanding status and comprehensive knowledge, acknowledge their equality with other creatures, and act in ways that benefit all creatures.

It is noteworthy that modern science, particularly in the study of the universe, has an ambivalent stance with regard to humility. On the one hand there is no place for humility, but only for human intelligence and excellence. This exemplifies exclusive humanism where humans are full of pride and are "striving for domination, with rationalistic science at its disposal" (Cheng 1998, 213). For instance, Michio Kaku (2011, 17) states that humans "will make the transition from being passive observers of the dance of nature, to being the choreographers of nature, to being masters of nature, and finally to being conservators of nature". Essentially, Kaku envisions a world where human intelligence supersedes all other forms of intelligence and humans have sole responsibility for everything, dominating every aspect of the universe.

On the other hand, some accounts affirm the place of humility in their discourse. As Peter Hodgson (1993, 252) argues, "compared with the vastness of space, we are totally insignificant. It should make us very humble, or perhaps afraid". This

perspective may be interpreted as a pessimistic or negative interpretation of humility, implying that this virtue or disposition is required because humans are insignificant. With regard to our discussion of inclusive humanism, this perspective seems to disregard the role of humans in the universe and their intrinsic value in fostering harmony or unity with the universe and other creatures. In contrast, Carl Sagan takes a more optimistic perspective (Sagan 1997, 13), stating:

> It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

Rather than focusing on what may be perceived as negatives, such as the tiny size of the world of humans compared to the vastness of the whole universe, Sagan reframes it to empower humans and their relationships with one another. This perspective also presents cosmo-ethics (i.e., the ethics of inclusive humanism), as it illustrates the universe and suggests how humans ought to live. The humbling reality of the place of humans in the universe should inspire kindness and responsibility towards one another. The universe has been kind by providing a home or dwelling space for us, and in a similar way, we should display kindness to each another. It is also the duty of humans to preserve and cherish this home, as Sagan notes, reminding us to act with a sense of responsibility.

While humility is understood as lowliness, with Aquinas (*ST* II-II, q.161, a.1, ad 2) describing it as "the notion of a praiseworthy self-abasement to the lowest place", this understanding is not applicable in the context of this article. Here, humility is not a necessary virtue or disposition because humans are lowly or insignificant. Instead, humility is abandoning pride and appreciating the role that people, however small, play in transforming themselves, other creatures, and the universe. Practicing humility also means listening to the universe in order to establish a harmonious relationship with it and all other creatures that inhabit it.

Conclusion

In this article, I offer a new perspective on Wang's defence of divination, relating it to inclusive humanism. By exploring Wang's reinterpretation of the concepts of *ziran*, *ming*, and *xing* in his defence of divination, I demonstrate how humans ought to live in the universe. *Ziran*, for instance, implies ontocosmological equality, which means the equality of things, including the equality of humans and other creatures.

Additionally, the concepts of *ming* and *xing* highlight how humans can transform themselves and play a part in transforming other creatures and the universe.

I take a step further to show how a humanist reading of Wang's defence of divination can be relevant today by promoting ontocosmological humility. This disposition or virtue can guide humans to acknowledge the intrinsic value of all creatures and their equality with them. It can also guide humans in their role to transform not only themselves but also other creatures and the universe. Human activities are inevitable, but problems have arisen due to their failure to regard other creatures and the universe and instead merely prioritized human benefits. Therefore, it is hoped that humans can act responsibly by rethinking their role or position in the universe and embodying ontocosmological humility.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
HUMANISM, POST-HUMANISM AND TRANSHUMANISM IN TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE:
Asian and European Paradigms

Comparative Approaches

Marxist Anthropology Through the Lens of the Philosophy of Language: Engels, Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao on the Origins of Humankind and Human Language

*YANG Xiaobo**

Abstract

Marxist anthropology, as a kind of philosophical anthropology and an integral part of Marxist philosophy, seeks to find an answer to the question of its primary concern—what is humanity or human nature? From the Marxist perspective, human beings are distinguished from animals by making and using tools, and the creation of tools is closely related to the birth of language and consciousness. In this context, Marxist anthropology tries to trace the origin of humankind through tracing that of tools, language and consciousness. Consequently, it is endowed with a dimension of the philosophy of language. In his article "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man", Engels proposed a hypothesis on the origins of humankind and human language, which constructed the framework of Marxist anthropology. This framework was subsequently adopted and developed by Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao, renowned philosophers in contemporary China and Vietnam, in establishing their own philosophical systems. This article, through illuminating and comparing Engels, Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao's hypotheses on the origins of humankind and human language, aims to shed new light on Marxist anthropology through the lens of the philosophy of language. I believe that this exploration will profoundly inspire the Marxist philosophy of language, an emerging trend in the field of the philosophy of language.

Keywords: Friedrich Engels, Li Zehou, Tran Duc Thao, Marxist anthropology, philosophy of language, origins of language

Marksistična antropologija skozi prizmo filozofije jezika: Engels, Li Zehou in Tran Duc Thao o izvoru človeštva in človeškem jeziku

Izvleček

Marksistična antropologija, kot vrsta filozofske antropologije in sestavni del marksistične filozofije, išče odgovor na vprašanje, ki jo primarno zanima – kaj je človečnost oziroma človeška narava? Z marksističnega vidika se človek od živali loči po izdelavi in uporabi

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orodja, nastanek orodja pa je tesno povezan z rojstvom jezika in zavestjo. V tem kontekstu poskuša marksistična antropologija slediti izvoru človeštva z raziskovanjem izvora orodij, jezika in zavesti ter se zato ukvarja s filozofijo jezika. Engels je v svojem članku »Vloga dela pri preobrazbi opice v človeka« predlagal hipotezo o izvoru človeštva in človeškega jezika, ki je zgradila okvir marksistične antropologije. Potem sta pri vzpostavljanju svojih lastnih filozofskih sistemov ta okvir prevzela ter razvila Li Zehou in Tran Duc Thao, priznana filozofa sodobne Kitajske in Vietnama. Avtor članka si s pomočjo osvetlitve ter primerjave hipotez Engelsa, Li Zehouja in Tran Duc Thaota o izvoru človeštva in človeškega jezika prizadeva v novo luč postaviti marksistično antropologijo skozi prizmo filozofije jezika ter meni, da bo to globoko navdihnilo marksistično filozofijo jezika, ki se pojavlja kot nova smer na področju filozofije jezika.

Ključne besede: Friedrich Engels, Li Zehou, Tran Duc Thao, marksistična antropologija, filozofija jezika, izvor jezika

Introduction: Marxist Anthropology and Marxist Philosophy of Language

Marxist anthropology, as a kind of philosophical anthropology and an integral part of Marxist philosophy, seeks to find an answer to the question of its primary concern—what is humanity or human nature? According to the classical definition given by Aristotle, human beings are rational and political animals, as well as animals that use language.[1] This definition has been developed and challenged ever since, and especially in modern times.[2] Marxist anthropology, starting from the position of historical materialism, proposed a hypothesis of anthropogenesis that human beings evolved from apes in the process of cooperative collective labour that was featured by the making and using of tools. A human who is able to undertake such kind of labour could be labelled as a *homo faber* (Latin words, literally, man the maker). This term was initially introduced by Appius Claudius Caecus, referring to the capacity of man to control his own destiny. Over time, it became commonly associated with the capacity to make and use tools. Hence, from the perspective of Marxist anthropology, human beings are differentiated from animals by making and using tools, which simultaneously prepared the soil for the growth of human language. And only with the birth of language could human beings think rationally and participate in politics

1 In *The Politics*, Aristotle defined human beings as political animals and animals endowed with the power of speech (see *The Politics*, Book I), and in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, he asserted that every human being has a rational principle (see *The Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 13).

2 For example, Ernst Cassirer adapted Aristotle's definition and defined human beings as symbolic animals (language is the most important symbolic system employed by human beings), while Freud, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche paid special attention to the irrational nature of human beings.

and other public affairs. This scenario of human evolution was first depicted by Frederick Engels in his article "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man", which constructed the framework of Marxist anthropology. In the years since, this framework has continuously been enriched and developed by many philosophers in their own ways. Among them, Li Zehou (李澤厚 1930–2021) and Tran Duc Thao (Trần Đức Thảo 1917–1993), renowned philosophers in contemporary China and Vietnam, have made the most significant and unique contributions, who endeavoured to trace the origin of humankind through tracing that of tools, language and consciousness. Regrettably, their endeavours have not received the attention they deserve.

As a kind of philosophical anthropology, Marxist anthropology seeks to propose a hypothesis of anthropogenesis, so to speak, more philosophically than scientifically, or in Li Zehou's words, more "logically" (*luojishangde* 邏輯上的) than "chronologically" (*shijianshangde* 時間上的). That is to say, its primary concern is how to define the "human being" and to differentiate humanity from animality. Though Marxist anthropology never neglects the evidence from scientific (including genetic, biological, archaeological and the like) discoveries, it has to be, to a certain degree, independent or ahead of such evidence, since to date no final conclusion has been drawn from science on such matter. Therefore, what Marxist anthropology attempts to provide is essentially a hypothesis in a philosophical way, while continuously seeking validation the latest scientific discoveries.

The hypothesis of anthropogenesis in Marxist anthropology, as we will see in this article, is closely related to that of the birth of tools, language and consciousness. Compared to Engels, Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao elaborated in much more detail on the important role that language had played in human evolution (with Thao paying more attention to the relationship between language and consciousness). This reveals a new approach to Marxist anthropology, namely, that of the philosophy of language. Hence, in this article, through illuminating and comparing Engels, Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao's hypotheses on the origins of humankind and human language, I intend to shed new light on Marxist anthropology through the lens of the philosophy of language. I believe that this exploration will profoundly inspire the Marxist philosophy of language, an emerging trend in the field of the philosophy of language.

Why Should Philosophy Be Concerned with the Problem of Language Origins?

In the past, the philosophy of language (here used in its narrow sense, referring specifically to analytic philosophy)[3] seldom paid attention to the problem of the origin of language. The so-called "linguistic turn" that occurred in the early 20th century in the West was precisely a turn to the approach of modern (or mathematical) logic invented by Gottlob Frege, rather than to that of modern linguistics. The findings in the latter field seem to have exerted quite a limited influence on the philosophy of language. However, Lin Yuanze 林遠澤 in his monograph *From Herder to Mead: The Classical German Philosophy of Language Towards the Communicative Community* (*Cong Hede dao Mide: Maixiang goutong gongtongti de Deguo gudian yuyan zhexue silu* 從赫德到米德：邁向溝通共同體的德國古典語言哲學思路) presented a different scenario of the development of philosophy of language in the West:

> [It] started from the rhetorical tradition and the Christian logos-mysticism in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Progressing through Dante's Humanism and Vico's "new science" during the Renaissance, it eventually reached its peak in the classical German philosophy of language, spanning from Herder to Mead. (Lin 2019, 23)[4]

According to Lin, this path of development is characterized by its humanism, because "it laid its philosophical foundation on a communicative community that was established in language". Furthermore, "precisely because it proceeded from investigations into the origin of language, it at the very beginning has led philosophy to a problem of philosophical anthropology, that is, 'what is humanity?'" (ibid., 22–23) Having realized that exploring the origin of humankind could not be done without exploring that of human language, Lin traced the emergence of the "linguistic turn" in the West back to the 18th century when Johann G. Herder published the book *Treatise upon the Origin of Language* (ibid., 25). Therefore, Lin contended that "the problems how and for what purpose language was created are obviously the most fundamental problems that the philosophy of language should concern" (ibid., 43). Though creatively adopting a perspective of the philosophy

3 The "philosophy of language" is not a clearly defined term. In a narrow sense, it specifically refers to Anglo-American analytic philosophy, which brought about a revolution to the philosophy of the early 20th century, known as the "linguistic turn"; while in a broad sense, it also includes the ontological reflections on language in modern Continental philosophy; besides, in a much broader sense, it could be used to refer to all the philosophical debates and reflections on language in all the schools of thoughts in history.

4 All the translations of the citations from Chinese texts are provided by the author of this article.

of language to address the problem of human origins, Lin unfortunately failed tomake a single reference to the philosophical anthropology of Marxism in that book, thereby overlooking its contribution to addressing the problems he raises.

Now I would like to stress again that, as mentioned above, the approach of philosophical anthropology is to some extent different from that of scientific (including genetic, biological, archaeological and the like) anthropology. As Li Zehou also noted:

> The problem of whether making and using tools is prior to the birth of language or not should be treated more logically than chronologically, [since] it is precisely the special kind of human activity, namely labour, that gave birth to language, or rather, gave language (animals may also have) the meaning that exclusively belongs to human beings, not the other way round. (Li 2008a, 152)

In the above statement, Li distinguished two perspectives to look at the problem, i.e. "logically" and "chronologically". The former takes a philosophical stance, while the latter takes a scientific one. To stress again, I am by no means declaring that these two perspectives are isolated from each other. On the contrary, they are interdependent. In Li's view, we have to clarify exactly what we mean by language before we judge whether it appears before tool or not. The reason why Li gives priority to the logical perspective is that, for him, the birth of language is marked by obtaining "the meaning that exclusively belongs to human beings"[5] from "the special kind of human activity, namely labour", which is precisely the way that Li insists we should understand the concept of "human language". That is to say, even if there were to exist some kind of language "chronologically" before the making and using of tools, it could not be regarded as real human language "logically", due to its lack of "the meaning that exclusively belongs to human beings", which should be obtained from human labour that entails the making and using of tools.

Not only Li Zehou's philosophy, but also philosophical anthropology in general, would give priority to the logical perspective. Viewed from this angle, what we could see would be the human beings who use language and the use of language by human beings, rather than an isolated and abstract language. Therefore, exploring human language is actually exploring the human beings who use language. This is also the reason why the problem of the origins of language is closely related with that of the origins of humankind.

5 What Li means by "the meaning that exclusively belongs to human beings", in my opinion, could be understood as human reason or human forms of knowledge. For Li, "the operational labour (*laodong caozuo* 勞動操作) of making and using tools shaped the specifically human forms of knowledge (logic, mathematics, dialectics and so on)" (Rošker 2020, 46).

Engels' Establishing of the Framework of Marxist Anthropology

In his famous article "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man", Engels proposed a hypothesis of anthropogenesis on the basis of historical materialism and Darwin's theory of evolution. In this hypothesis, he highly emphasized the decisive role of labour and language in human evolution (especially labour, since language is believed to be born from it). The greatest contribution of this text, in my opinion, might be that it established the earliest framework of Marxist anthropology. The main idea of this article could be encapsulated into four statements from it, which could also be construed as answers to the questions that philosophical anthropology concerns most.

The first question is: What is the nature of human beings? Engels' answer is: "In a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself" (Engels 1987, 452). That is, for Engels, the nature of human beings is moulded in the process of labour, so it is labour that essentially differentiates human beings from animals. Thus, here arises the second question: What is the nature of human labour? Engels' answer is: "Labour begins with the making of tools" (ibid., 457). Engels takes the making (and I think he also means the using) of tools as the feature of human labour, which as we will see in the following is also the force that drives human evolution. So here follows the third question: Besides this (the labour featured by the making and using of tools), is there any other force that also drives human evolution? Engels' answer is: "First labour, after it and then with it speech—these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man" (ibid., 455). The second driving force that Engels listed is speech (or language), but it is obviously subordinate to labour. The fourth question naturally turns to language: What is the origin of language? Engels' answer is: "This explanation of the origin of language from and in the process of labour is the only correct one" (ibid.). Though Engels pointed out the origin of language, he did not elaborate on how language was born in that process. As he said, "Labour begins with the making of tools"; thus the explanation of the birth of language must be closely related with that of the birth of tools. Engels himself did not provide any explanation, but Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao did, which enriched and developed Engels' framework, as we will see in the following sections.

In order to better understand Engels' hypothesis on the origins of humankind and human language, I illustrate it with the following figure (see Figure 1).

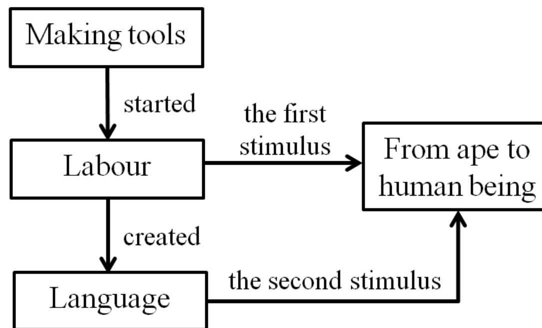

Figure 1: Engels' hypothesis on the origins of humankind and human language.

As Figure 1 shows, making tools played a decisive role in the process of human evolution, because it started real human labour, making it different from animal labour, which finally distinguished human beings from animals; and then, real human labour, which is featured by the making (as well as using) of tools, gave birth to real human language. And ever since then, labour and language combined, as two stimuli, continued to drive evolution from ape to human. However, another question may arise: If labour begins with the making of tools, as Engels hypothesizes, how does the activity of making tools begin? I think we could find a clue to this question in the same article. According to Engels, making tools is only possible on the condition that the hands of apes become free, no longer used for walking, but for labouring. As he put it:

> Owing to their way of living which meant that the hands had different functions than the feet when climbing, these apes began to lose the habit of using their hands to walk and adopted a more and more erect posture. This *was the decisive step in the transition from ape to man*. …
>
> It stands to reason that if erect gait among our hairy ancestors became first the rule and then, in time, a necessity, other diverse functions must, in the meantime, have devolved upon the hands. Already among the apes there is some difference in the way the hands and the feet are employed. …
>
> But the decisive step had been taken, *the hand had become free* and could henceforth attain ever greater dexterity; the greater flexibility thus

> acquired was inherited and increased from generation to generation. (Engels 1987, 452–53)

Like Engels, Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao also emphasize the role that the hands played in human evolution, but in different ways. Engels never regards the using of hands as a direct stimulus to the birth of language. However, according to Li and Thao, it is the using of hands (especially gestures) in labour that gave birth to consciousness, and then, to language, both of which are closely related.

Engels' most important contribution to Marxist anthropology, as I mentioned earlier, lies in his formulation of its basic framework. However, being a framework it needs to be enriched and developed, because of its lack of details and ambiguities in arguments. For example, he did not explain in sufficient detail how labour begins with the making of tools, and how language is created in the process of labour. For another example, when he claimed that "the hand is not only the organ of labour, *it is also the product of labour*" (Engels 1987, 455), does this imply that labour is the cause of (and naturally occurs before) the freedom of the hands? If this is true, it seems to contradict another statement of his that "labour begins with the making of tools", since tools can never be made without the help of the hands. That being so, I think labour should be regarded as the consequence, instead of the cause, of the freedom of the hands. In my opinion, the only possible way to explain away the paradox in Engels' statements above is to assume that the word "labour" he used in these statements has different connotations. This is exactly the way Li Zehou treated the problem, as we will see in the following section.

Li Zehou's Contribution: Classifying Labour into Two Levels

Li Zehou is one of the most influential and creative philosophers in contemporary China, who calls his philosophy—an inventive combination of Western (mainly from Kant and Marx) and traditional Chinese (mainly from Confucianism) philosophies—"anthropological ontology" (*renleixue bentilun* 人類學本體論) or "pragmatic philosophy of subjectality" (*zhutixing shijian zhexue* 主體性實踐哲學) (Li 2008a, 115). However, we may ask: Why does this kind of philosophy concern the problem of language? Li Zehou, as I have pointed out, never wrote any complete book or article with a major focus on language, but did remark on it in most of his works throughout his philosophical life. Moreover, these remarks, which are basically critiques on the philosophy of language and the "linguistic turn" in the West, constitute an integral part of Li's philosophy (see Yang 2020a; 2020b).

Li Zehou once wrote: "What has been haunting me for decades is the question of 'how to move beyond language', or rather, 'how to escape from the prison-house of language'" (Li and Liu 2012, 1), and he reiterated this idea on many occasions (see, for example, Li and Liu 2012, 164; Li and Liu 2011, 78, 107; Li 2008a, 37; 2008b, 18; Li and Liu 2009, 25). Maintaining a Marxist view of practice as its foundation, Li's philosophy, which he nicknamed "the philosophy of eating (*chifan zhexue* 吃飯哲學)", naturally seeks to "move beyond language" and goes back to the material base for the subsistence of human beings, as he asserted that the starting point of his philosophy is practice (*wei* 為) rather than words (*yan* 言) (Li and Liu 2012, 35). For this reason, in dealing with the problem of the origin of language he inevitably insists on the priority of practice over language (Li 2007, 71; 2008a, 3, 220; Li and Liu, 2011, 7; 2012, 3–4). Li absorbed Engels' philosophical anthropology, and enriched it with more details and new ideas, which are mainly embodied in his following statement. For convenience in comparing his view with Engels', I also illustrate the following statement with a figure (see Figure 2).

> The apes' using and accidental making of tools in the long process of "primitive labour" (the primordial form of practice) gave birth to consciousness and language; and thereafter the primitives started the intentional, goal-oriented and language-involved activity of using and making tools. Therefore, the progression of "primitive labour—consciousness and language—human labour" could be taken as a thread running through the whole process of the evolution from ape to human being. (Li 2008a, 220–21)

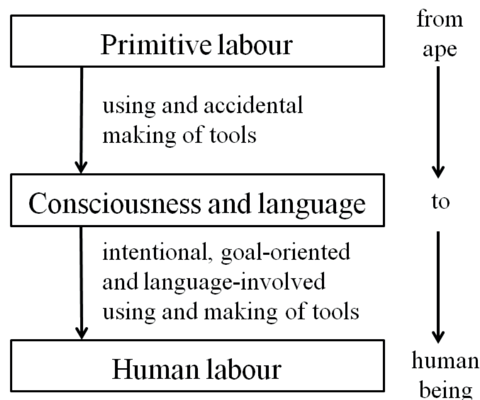

Figure 2: Li Zehou's hypothesis on the origins of humankind and human language.

Comparing Figures 1 and 2, we may easily see that, like Engels, Li Zehou also considers labour (which features the making and using of tools) and language (which is born from labour) as two stimuli that drive the evolution from ape to human being. However, Li adapted and enriched Engels' theory in the following three aspects: First, he classified labour into two levels: primitive and human. Second, he distinguished two stages of the making of tools: an accidental stage and an intentional, goal-oriented and language-involved stage. Third, he counted consciousness as another force that also drives human evolution together with language. Among these aspects, the first should be seen as the central one, because it provides a frame of reference on which Li classified tools and language, which are also thought to be developed from the primitive to the human level in the process of labour. Tools at the primitive level are named by Li "natural tools" (*tianran gongju* 天然工具), which, according to his ideas, have to go through several stages before finally developed into real tools:

> starting from the using of natural tools, to action thinking (*dongzuo siwei* 動作思維) and primitive language (*yuanshi yuyan* 原始語言) (from which consciousness arises), and then, through an inference from the result (to achieve a goal like getting food) to the cause (tools and the using of tools), finally acquiring the capacity of representing an object [in mind] (*mudi biaoxiang* 目的表象) (which marks the creation of [real] tools). (Li 2008a, 198)

It is noteworthy that what Li means by "tool" in the context of "the apes' using and accidental making of tools" are not real tools in the Marxist sense. They are just some natural materials like stones or twigs, picked directly and accidentally from nature. They are actually "instruments" in Marx's terminology,[6] and called by Li "natural tools" on other occasions. Besides, what Li means by "accidental making" refers to the making that is not intentional or goal-oriented, without an image of the finished object (i.e. the representation of the object) in mind beforehand. It relies on "action thinking", which means thinking and acting are performed simultaneously, adjustments being made in the process of practice according to specific situations. Natural tools are thus made, which are different from real tools in that they are not made with the representation of an object in mind beforehand. The representation of an object marks the birth of consciousness (whose relationship with language will be expounded in detail in the following section), and distinguishes human labour from animal labour, as Marx said, "what distinguishes the

6 According to Marx, "an instrument of labour is a thing, or a complex of things, which the labourer interposes between himself and the subject of his labour, and which serves as the conductor of his activity. He makes use of the mechanical, physical, and chemical properties of some substances in order to make other substances subservient to his aims" (Marx 1996, 189).

worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality" (Marx 1996, 188).

In conclusion, according to Li, language and consciousness were born from the using and accidental making of natural tools at the stage of primitive labour, which made the representation of an intended object possible; and only on such a condition were real tools created, which finally turned primitive labour into human labour. In other words, human labour is characterized by "the intentional, goal-oriented and language-involved activity of making and using tools". Furthermore, what is also noteworthy here is that the language appearing in the middle of Figure 2 placed by the side of consciousness actually refers to the primitive language. It has very simple form and ambiguous meanings, because it "blends the declarative, imperative and referential functions of a language (for example, by using the so called "sentence-words"); besides, it reflects both the objective facts (by its declarative and referential functions) and the subjective requirements (by its imperative and expressive functions)" (Li 2011, 204). In primitive language, words and sentences are not assigned specific functions, as natural tools are in primitive labour. However, with their functions being gradually defined, primitive language would be transformed into human language, and natural tools into real tools.

As noted above, Li Zehou also enriched Engel's framework of Marxist anthropology by counting consciousness as a second driving force besides language for human evolution. Thus, we may ask: How is consciousness born? And how is its birth related to the birth of language? Li has not provided any answer to the second question, while to the first his answer is simply as follows:

> The move of the hands that are using tools always badly needs the attention from the eyes. … Such attention paid to the hands signifies the budding of the consciousness that one is being engaged in an activity. That is to say, one begins to form a simple representation or even a memory of the labour (or practice) he or she is engaged in. (Li 2011, 196)

The reason why consciousness arises from the attention to the hands, to be more exact, is that such attention enables one to separate the subject (of labour) from the object (of labour), which prepares the soil for the growth of consciousness. However, such separation can never occur only within one person, but must take place among persons, because "I" can never be discovered only from my doing something, but from my being not "others". Therefore, Li's explanation is insufficient and even seems problematic. Now let us turn to Tran Duc Thao, a remarkable but long neglected contemporary Vietnamese philosopher, who treated the above two questions in much more detail.

Tran Duc Thao's Contribution: Clarifying the Relationship Between Language and Consciousness

Tran Duc Thao, as the most famous philosopher in contemporary Vietnam, is often placed on a par with György Lukács, the eminent Hungarian Marxist philosopher (Ruan and Ruan 2011, 63). Initially influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, Thao studied under Merleau-Ponty at the École Normale Supérieure for many years. After that, he turned to Marxism, and made his debut on the stage of philosophy in 1951 with his first monograph *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism* (hereinafter *PDM*). This book, as an attempt to address the problems raised by phenomenology itself through the lens of Marxism, soon acquired a wide readership once published, which made Tran Duc Thao a prominent name in phenomenological circles at that time. In 1973, Thao's monograph *Investigations into the Origin of Language and Consciousness* (hereinafter *IOLC*), the most important work of his later period, was published in France. Unfortunately, since his return to Vietnam in 1951, he endured prolonged political persecution from the authorities. Due to his long absence from the philosophical community, Thao's name has become unfamiliar to the new generation of philosophers, and thus his new book did not receive the attention it deserved.

We may wonder why Tran Duc Thao in his later period was preoccupied with the problem of the origins of language and consciousness. Thao himself did not give any explanation, but we have reason to believe that it may have been in order to address the problems left over from his early career. As he wrote in the preface to *PDM*, a book that marks his turn from phenomenology to Marxism, "Marxism appears to us as the only conceivable solution to problems raised by phenomenology itself" (Trân 1986, xxi). As D'Alonzo pointed out,

> To Thao, the phenomenological approach to the study of consciousness had not been radical enough because Husserl failed to understand the natural origins of consciousness. According to Thao, the evolution of species and then the development of human society offer a solid basis to understand the actual nature of consciousness. (D'Alonzo 2018, 47)

Therefore, in the second part of *PDM* Thao attempted to provide a materialistic interpretation to the origin of consciousness. This is also the reason why he wrote *IOLC*, because for Thao "the easiest way to understand the formation of consciousness is by beginning with the study of the symbolic skills we can observe among mammals" (ibid.). Therefore, Thao attempted to trace the origins of these symbolic skills (namely language, including both gestural and verbal forms) and

explore what role they had played in the process of human evolution, in order to figure out how human beings are differentiated from other mammals by these special symbolic skills they use.

By doing so, Thao linked the problem of the origins of consciousness to that of the origins of language, and further, as we will see in the following, to that of the origins of tools. He wrote at the very beginning of *IOLC*: "Consciousness must first of all be studied in its 'immediate reality': language understood naturally in its general sense as gestural and verbal language" (Trân 1984, 4). In declaring this, Thao was echoing Marx and Engels' idea put forward in *The German Ideology* that "*language* is the immediate actuality of thought" (Marx and Engels 1975, 446). Through an investigation into the origins of language and consciousness in a practical, social and historical context, Thao also proposed a hypothesis of anthropogenesis, which enriched Engels' and Li Zehou's theories in many respects, especially making clear the relationship between language and consciousness.

Like Engels and Li Zehou, Tran Duc Thao also regarded labour, as well as language (which is thought to be born from labour), as the primary force that drives human evolution. In addition, he also emphasized the role that the hands played in the process of this evolution, but his focus was on how the indicative gesture stimulated the birth of language and consciousness. Both Li and Thao held that consciousness arose from the separation of subject from object, which occurred in the process of labour. For Li, this separation is realized through the attention paid to the hands that are using tools. Thao must have agreed with Li on this point, since he explained more clearly that "consciousness appears identically as *consciousness of the object* and *consciousness of self*" (Trân 1984, 11). Though both of them arrived at the same conclusion, Thao traced the origin of consciousness a step further than Li did. Like Li, Thao also stressed the importance of gestural language, but he did not take this kind of language as the source of consciousness, because he thought that it already contained a set of symbolic sign structures. Therefore, Thao traced the origin of consciousness back to the primitive form of gestural language, that is, the indicative gestures adopted by prehominid workers in their collective labour. For a better understanding of Tran Duc Thao's hypothesis on the origins of humankind and human language, I also illustrate it with a figure (see Figure 3).

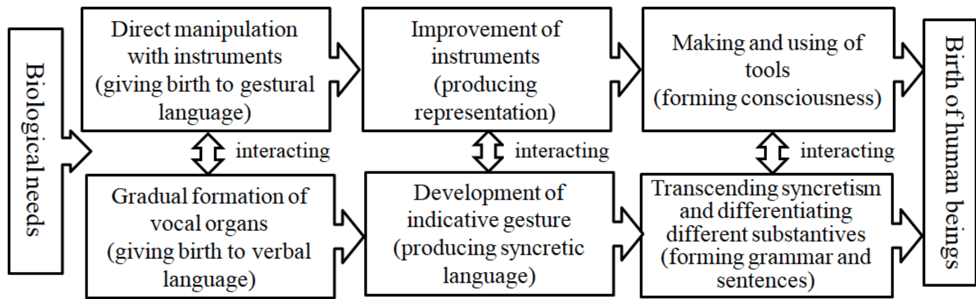

Figure 3: Tran Duc Thao's hypothesis on the origins of humankind and human language.

In short, according to Thao, primitive workers created the earliest forms (both gestural and verbal) of language in the process of labour in order to meet their basic biological needs. After that, through the interactive development of gestural and verbal language, consciousness and tools emerged as two pivotal driving forces in the process of human evolution. Like Li Zehou, Tran Duc Thao also placed his hypothesis on a materialistic basis, namely the need to meet biological needs such as food, clothing, housing and other necessities. Furthermore, he also attempted to trace the development from instrument to tool, dividingit into five stages: (1) the natural instrument; (2) the prepared instrument; (3) the elaborated instrument; (4) the produced instrument; and (5) the tool (Trân 1984, 47). The difference between an instrument and a tool, in short, is that an instrument is intentionally made (or more exactly, in Thao's words, "prepared", "elaborated" and "produced") to be a tool. According to Thao, at the very beginning of labour prehominid workers had already mastered the skills of employing instruments, which is regarded by him as a kind of "adaptive labour" or "direct manipulation", because it is precisely like an act of groping, performed merely through trial and error, without the medium of concept or representation. At this stage, the capacity of representing an object has not been developed yet, and it is not required for making or using an instrument, because instrument as natural object is always taken by a worker as an extended limb, rather than something existing outside the body that should be recognized through the representation of its image. As Marx said, "Thus Nature becomes one of the organs of his activity, one that he annexes to his own bodily organs, adding stature to himself in spite of the Bible" (Marx 1996, 189). Later, in order to achieve more efficient cooperation in acts of labour, gestural language appeared. Almost at the same time, and for the same purpose, when "men in the making arrived at the point where *they had something to say* to each other" (Engels 1987, 455), their vocal organs were gradually evolved so as to be suitable for speaking, and then, verbal language appeared.

With the increasing frequency of employing instruments in labour increasing, the existence of the outside world is perceived; and subsequently, the consciousness of the subject as opposed to the object arises. According to Thao, the dichotomy between subject and object is derived from the using of indicative gesture, which is the initial form of gestural language. On the one hand, since indicating is a gesture pointing to something outside of "me", it must be accompanied by the consciousness of "externality"; in addition, the gesture of pointing at something with a finger presupposes the existence of an object, so it must be accompanied by the consciousness of "this here". As a result, the consciousness of the object is established in this kind of gesture. As Thao concluded: "In short, the meaning of the indicative gesture in no way refers to any other sign. It uniquely and directly refers to *the thing itself* in its external existence as independent of the subject, in other words in its *material* existence" (Trân 1984, 34). On the other hand, the consciousness of the subject (namely the self) also arises from the indicative gesture. As Thao pointed out, "The indicative gesture to oneself naturally derives from the gesture we use in pointing things out to others. … In the case of the indicative gesture to oneself, we have only one subject, both guiding and guided" (ibid., 7). That is to say, "I" can point out an object not only for others, but also for "myself"; in addition, "I" can also point at "myself" as an object. In a word, as Marx and Engels put it, "consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*] can never be anything else than conscious being [*das bewusste Sein*]" (Marx and Engels 1975, 36). Therefore, being conscious of the object implies the existence of the external world, while being conscious of the subject implies the existence of the "self" as opposed to the external world.

As stated in the foregoing, consciousness arises from the separation of subject from object. However, it can never occur only within one person, but among persons. As such, consciousness seems most unlikely to arise only from one person's attention paid to his or her own hands, as Li Zehou hypothesized. Though both Li and Thao established their hypotheses on the same grounds, namely that productive labour, in which the attention of the eyes is paid to the hands (Li's hypothesis), and the indicative gesture is frequently adopted (Thao's hypothesis), Thao is different from Li in that he focuses on "the relation of reciprocity" among workers. To better explain this relation, Thao envisaged a scenario of collective labour, where prehominid workers, for the sake of better cooperation, are trying to communicate with each other by pointing things out to others:

> In the activity of collective labour, the workers point out to each other the object of their common efforts. Each is thus, alternatively, or even simultaneously, the giver and the receiver of the indication, both the one who guides and is guided. The workers see each other reciprocally in this

> double function. In other words, each sees in the other a being similar to himself, making the same gesture or rather he sees the other as *another self*. (Trân 1984, 8)

The indicative gesture, according to Thao, still has an original form, that is, "a guidance act at a distance, [which] implies, in fact, at least two subjects, one guiding and the other guided, separated by a certain distance" (ibid., 7). This original indicative gesture enables the workers to "see themselves in the others 'as in a mirror'" (ibid., 8); thus, the "self" is established from being separated from "others". As Marx put it: "Peter only establishes his own identity as a man by first comparing himself with Paul as being of like kind. And thereby Paul, just as he stands in his Pauline personality, becomes to Peter the type of the *genus homo*" (Marx 1996, 63). Thao's intention of depicting such a scenario of collective labour is to reveal "the relation of reciprocity" among people, which, as the basis of communicative practice, makes the cooperation in collective labour possible. Communicative practice and productive practice constitute two interwoven dimensions of social practice; and "to Thao, social practice is the most decisive factor in the evolution of language" (D'Alonzo 2018, 55).

According to Thao, after the birth of gestural language, and under its influence, verbal language appears almost simultaneously, since indicative gesture, the initial form of gestural language, is actually a guidance act at a distance, and the distance has to be finally bridged by a vocal form of language. As Thao put it, "In reality the guidance movement does not consist in simply tracing a direction, it has essentially the function of a *call*. … [Thus, gradually,] as a call, it is naturally completed by the normal form of a call, the vocal form" (Trân 1984, 9). Li Zehou distinguished human language from animal language by "the meaning that exclusively belongs to human beings" obtained from "the special kind of human activity, namely labour" (Li 2008a, 152). However, Li did not clearly define such meaning and explain how it is obtained from human labour. In my view, such meaning must be characterized by the capacity of representing, or "pointing at" (in Thao's words), an object, as the role that indicative gesture plays, but in a vocal form. According to Thao, the representation of an object in mind signifies the awareness of "this here", namely, recognizing the existence of an object, which makes human labour an intentional and goal-oriented activity. As Marx pointed out: "The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life activity*. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity" (Marx 1975, 276).

The capacity of representation also makes the creation of tools possible, because a tool is differentiated from an instrument in that the former "must be determined

in its *total shape*" (Trân 1984, 46). In other words, before making a tool there should exist a finished and complete image of the tool that we are going to make in our mind beforehand. In addition, Thao thinks that transforming an instrument into a tool also requires

> the use of a second instrument to act on the raw material [, … but it] is only possible at the moment when the preparation of the instrument occurs *in the absence of the biological object*, which is replaced by its simple *representation*. In fact, in such a situation, the raw material as object of the need to transform it into an instrument, becomes dominant in the dynamic field of perception, which allows it to attract a third object as an intermediary. (Trân 1984, 39)

As shown in Figure 3, labour is stimulated by biological needs, and thus so is the labour of transforming an instrument into a tool, in which a second instrument needs to be inserted as an intermediary. Hence it would become the object of labour, while the biological object has to be suspended temporarily in some way. It, is only possible, according to Thao, when the capacity of representation is acquired, because it enables biological needs to be suspended in the form of its simple representation.

By means of representation, the indicative gesture got developed, which simultaneously led the verbal language to maturity. A developed indicative gesture, as a linguistic sign, according to Thao, produces an image whose content usually includes three key elements: (1) the object (i.e. the "this here"), (2) the motion, and (3) the form (Trân 1984, 50). Thao provided an example of the goodbye gesture: The image of this gesture implies (1) the person going away (the object), which is "produced by the tension of the hand and of the look toward the person going away"; (2) going away (the motion of the object), which "is projected by the agitation of the outstretched hand"; and (3) distancing (the form of the motion), "which results from the projection of the alternating form of the motion of raising and lowering of hand" (ibid.). Thao encapsulated the composition of the image of a developed indicative gesture into the following formula:

> the "this here" (T) in a motion (M) in some form (F), or: TMF. Such a formula, which we may call a *formula of developed indication*, contains a certain number of possible transformations which will allow us to understand the *polysemy* of the word which reinforces the gesture. (Trân 1984, 50)

Once the fundamental formula TMF and its variants (i.e. TFM, MFT, MTF, FTM and FMT), as linguistic signs, are linked to the sounds, real human verbal language will come into being, which will no longer be any inarticulate murmurs and shouts, but become what Saussure calls "articulated speech"[7] (de Saussure 2011, 10, 113). The budding verbal language, according to Thao, is a kind of "syncretic language", composed of "functional sentences", which, as combinations of TMF and its variants, are quite simple and ambiguous, like an instrument, whose function has not been clearly defined. The syncretism of functional sentences would certainly lead to misunderstandings in communication, so they have to be clarified with additional gestures, which would enrich the original semiotic structure, and eventually get syncretism transcended. Only when "each linguistic term is a member, an *articulus* in which an idea is fixed in a sound and a sound becomes the sign of an idea" (ibid., 113), as Saussure said, could ideas be clearly expressed. Therefore, Saussure takes articulation as the nature of human language: "We can say that what is natural to mankind is not oral speech but the faculty of constructing a language, i.e. a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas" (ibid., 10).

Concluding Remarks: Marxist Philosophy of Language as a New Trend

Although Engels, Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao were not professional linguists, as philosophers, they treated language in a philosophical way, and creatively integrated the problem of language into their own philosophical systems. Their treatment of language through the lens of Marxist anthropology, in my opinion, will profoundly inspire the Marxist philosophy of language, an emerging field in the philosophy of language. Hence, in the conclusion of this article, I would like to give some remarks on why and how the Marxist philosophy of language, with Marxist anthropology as its basis, would contribute to the development of the philosophy of language in the 21st century.

As early as in the 1970s, the Marxist philosophy of language, as a new trend in this stream of philosophy, has already been referred to in the book *Main Trends in Philosophy*, compiled by Paul Ricoeur. As a new approach, it was thought to have offered a challenge to the traditional philosophy of language (namely the analytic philosophy):

7 Saussure defines "articulated speech" like this: "In Latin, articulus means a member, part, or subdivision of a sequence; applied to speech, articulation designates either the subdivision of a spoken chain into syllables or the subdivision of the chain of meanings into significant units" (de Saussure 2011, 10).

> An earlier bias against the philosophically relevant achievements of linguistics has gone, but Marxism continues to reject any tendency to set up language as an absolute; in this it is resolutely opposed to logical positivism and any reduction of philosophy to "linguistic analysis". For Marxist philosophy, the genuinely philosophical problems are those of *Weltanschauung*; the relationship of matter and consciousness, and man's place in the world. (Ricoeur 1979, 260)

The positive effect that Marxism would bring about with regard to the traditional philosophy of language, in my opinion, must be the deconstruction of the language-centered ontology resulting from the "linguistic turn" that occurred in the early 20th century in the West. "The essence of Marxist philosophy lies in this," said Li Zehou, "that is, to take life and practice as something more fundamental than language, and to take the practice of using and making tools as the foundation of social life and the root of human's existence" (Li 2008a, 233). Jean-Jacques Lecercle, in his book *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*, a pivotal work on this issue, listed six theses and attempted to construct a framework for this field:

> Main thesis: language is a form of *praxis*. First positive thesis: language is a historical phenomenon. Second positive thesis: language is a social phenomenon. Third positive thesis: language is a material phenomenon. Fourth positive thesis: language is a political phenomenon. Concluding thesis: language is the site of subjectivation through interpellation. (Lecercle 2006, 139)

What Lecercle intended to highlight in this framework was the ideological aspect of human language. It sounds plausible to define humans as social or political animals, yet we should never neglect the foundation on which we are able to give such a definition, that is, the fact that human beings are differentiated from animals by making and using tools. This should be the most fundamental dimension of *praxis*, but Lecercle did not include it in his framework, and *a fortiori*, he did not touch upon the problem of language origins which is closely related to the creation of tools. Therefore, the framework that Lecercle formulated seems to be an incomplete one, since the abovementioned aspects were left aside.

As we can see from the foregoing discussion, the intention of Engels, Li Zehou and Tran Duc Thao's tracing of the origin of language is actually to trace that of humankind. Therefore, the core concern of their philosophical anthropology goes beyond an isolated and abstract language, but falls upon the human beings who use language and the use of language by human beings. However, a question may arise here: After we "move beyond language", as Li advocated, where

shall we go? Li's answer is "to return back towards life" (Li 2009, 28; 2011, 107). This opinion would most likely win the approval of Engels and Thao, for both advocated "the language of real life", a notion put forward by Marx and Engels in *German Ideology*, with the conviction that language is deeply rooted in the material activity and the material intercourse among humans (see D'Alonzo 2018). Li's conceptualization of "life", however, is much broader, which "refers to the activities in the mundane world, including the trivia of daily life like eating, sleeping and socializing, rather than the religious life in pursuit of a super-mundane world" (Yang 2020a, 3). The practice of daily life definitely includes the social practice (both productive and communicative ones), which constitutes its material base, but it is never limited to this. It should include all the activities of our daily life. By the same token, though language is born from social practice, it still continues getting itself enriched in all the activities of daily life. For this reason, Li goes a step further than Engels and Thao by unfolding the panorama of the development of language, from its birth to its maturity. The birth of language, as the result of social practice, could be explained within Li's "techno-social formation" (*gongyi-shehui jiegou* 工藝–社會結構), with an emphasis on the "tool as root" (*gongju benti* 工具本體) among other "roots" (*benti* 本體) in his philosophy; while the maturation of language, which occurs in our everyday experience, could be explained within his "cultural-psychological formation" (*wenhua-xinli jiegou* 文化–心理結構), with an emphasis on the "emotion as root" (*qing benti* 情本體).[8]

Li Zehou's advocating of "returning back towards life" echoes later Wittgenstein in some respects, as the latter asserted that the focus of philosophy should return to "ordinary language" and daily life. It is notable that Li referred to Wittgenstein (especially the later one) many times in his works (see, for example, Li 2007, 70–71; 2008a, 124, 127, 219–20, 232–33; Liu and Li 2010, 63; Li and Liu 2012, 3), praising his opinions that "language games" could be regarded as the "forms of life" and language should be explored in its daily use, because Li thinks these opinions perfectly reveal the fact that there must exist something more fundamental than language (Li 2008a, 233; Liu and Li 2010, 63). Therefore, as Li asserted, "My philosophy sets out exactly from where Wittgenstein's philosophy ends" (Li 2008a, 127). The comparison between Li Zehou and Wittgenstein is

8 The "techno-social formation" (*gongyi-shehui jiegou* 工藝—社會結構) and the "cultural-psychological formation" (*wenhua-xinli jiegou* 文化—心理結構) constitute respectively the external and the internal aspect of the "subjectality" (*zhutixing* 主體性), a cardinal notion of Li Zehou's philosophy. The "tool as root" (*gongju benti* 工具本體) and the "emotion as root" (*qing benti* 情本體) are known as the "pair of core roots" (*shuang benti* 雙本體). The reason why Li picks them out among other "roots" (*benti* 本體), in my opinion, is for highlighting the importance of them, because they well embody the two most important factors that distinguish human beings from animals.

a very interesting and valuable topic, to which very little attention has been paid to date, although it is one that is too huge to be dealt with in great depth in the current article.

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On Small and Large Vessels: Anthropological Difference according to Matteo Ricci and Zhu Xi

*Mateusz JANIK**

Abstract

The following paper offers a comparative study of Song Neo-Confucian and late Ming Jesuit arguments on the exceptionality of human beings and the role played by non-human others in the process of producing the discursive premises of the anthropological difference. It focuses on the arguments made by Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in favour of a claim that there is something particular about being human. Its historical premise is that the Jesuit missionary activity in China resulted in a peculiar encounter between the scholastic tradition, based on Aristotle's philosophy, and Confucian teachings. In case of Chinese as well as Western philosophical discourse, the figure of the non-human other has played an important role in establishing the very meaning of being human.

Keywords: anthropological difference, Zhu Xi, Matteo Ricci, Neo-Confucianism, Jesuit acccomodationism, non-human

O majhnih in velikih posodah: antropološka diferenca po Matteu Ricciju in Zhu Xiju

Izvleček

Članek se ukvarja s primerjalno raziskavo argumentov Songovskega neokonfucijanstva in poznejših jezuitskih misijonarjev dinastije Ming o izjemnosti človeka ter vlogi, ki jo imajo nečloveški drugi pri ustvarjanju diskurzivnih predpostavk antropološke diference. Osredotoča se na argumente, ki sta jih izpostavila Zhu Xi (朱熹; 1130–1200) in Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) v prid trditvi, da je biti človek nekaj posebnega. Njena zgodovinska predpostavka je, da je jezuitska misijonarska dejavnost na Kitajskem privedla do posebnega srečanja med sholastično tradicijo, ki temelji na Aristotelovi filozofiji, in konfucijanskim naukom. V primeru kitajskega in zahodnega filozofskega diskurza je lik nečloveškega drugega odigral pomembno vlogo pri vzpostavljanju samega pomena človeškosti.

Ključne besede: antropološka diferenca, Zhu Xi, Matteo Ricci, neokonfucijanstvo, jezuitska akomodacija, nečlovek

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The following paper offers a comparative study of Song Neo-Confucian and late Ming Jesuit arguments on the exceptionality of the human condition and the role played by the non-human others in the process of producing the discursive premises of the anthropological difference. It focuses on the way Zhu Xi (朱熹;1130–1200) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) argued in favour of a claim that there is something particular about being human. The Jesuit missionary activity in China resulted in a peculiar encounter between the scholastic tradition, based on Aristotle's philosophy, and Confucian teachings. In both cases, the figure of the non-human other has played an important role in establishing the very meaning of being human. Below I will refer to the set of concepts and arguments devised to express and secure the gap between the human and the non-human as "anthropological difference". This notion has gained certain recognition in recent decades, particularly within the scholarship located at the intersection of anthropology, animal studies and philosophy, opening new perspectives on the question of otherness, historically anchored in the binary of the human and non-human world (Agamben 2004; Glock 2012; Steiner 2010; Gross et al. 2012; Braidotti 2013). Studies concerning the role played by animals and other non-human beings in formation of Chinese culture, philosophy and political thought and imagery (Møllgaard 2010; Nappi 2012; Sterckx 2012; Lynn 2019; Back 2018; D'Ambrosio 2022) could be taken as part of this "non-human turn" (Grusin and Grusin 2015) in the contemporary humanities. Both Neo-Confucian learning of the Cheng-Zhu school as well as Jesuit scholastics introduced in China by Ricci, mainly through his 1603 cathehism *Tianzhu shiyi* (天主實義, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*; Ricci 2016), addressed the question of anthropological difference in a direct manner; a fact that provides a convenient comparative ground for studying how the Neo-Confucian tradition interfered with Western thinking at the early stage of the Sino-European intellectual exchange. I am particularly interested in the way Ricci's attempted to explain the "Western" variant of the anthropological difference through the Confucian conceptual apparatus resulted in a version of the anthropological difference that accommodated certain features of its Neo-Confucian counterpart. The paper begins with a short account of a juxtaposition of "Western" and Neo-Confucian teachings on the difference between humans and other beings offered by Huang Baijia (黄百家, 1643–1709) in the early Qing anthology of Neo-Confucian schools *Songyuan xue'an* (宋元學案, Records of Song and Yuan Scholars; Huang Zongxi 2007). Secondly, I will discuss Zhu Xi's views on the way human and non-human beings differ from each other, and his answer to the question of what constitutes the specificity of human condition. In the third section I will analyse the way in which Ricci's presentation of the Aristotelian theory of the soul is blended with the Confucian vocabulary. I will argue

that both Ricci and Zhu Xi offered a view which contrasted the fundamental openness of human nature with the nature of "beasts and animals" presented as enclosed and limited by the material conditions of their existence. In the concluding section I will look at the broader ramifications of arguments made by Zhu Xi and Ricci, showing that in both cases the anthropological difference could be taken as a discursive device used as a means of introducing otherness as a normative concept.

Sentient Trees and Benevolent Cats

Jesuit missionaries operating in the late Ming China faced a difficult task of translating the scholastic conceptual apparatus into the complex network of Chinese philosophical notions. This task was difficult for a variety of reasons, conditioned by the fact that the Jesuits were only gradually gaining acquaintance with the canonical texts that provided the conceptual reservoir for the philosophical discourse used by the scholars during the late Ming dynasty. One of the first attempts to present Christian doctrine to the Chinese in a form of systematic textual exposition, *Tianzhu shilu* (天主實錄, *The True Record of the Lord of Heaven*) composed by Michel Ruggieri (1543–1607) and published in 1584, was based mainly on Buddhist terminology. It was eventually superseded by Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi*, a text which engaged more consciously in the debate with Confucian philosophy (on a critical assessment of the difference between *Tianzhu shilu* and *Tianzhu shiyi* see Canaris 2019). It is in this text where we find Chinese translations of terminology that constituted Aristotelian tripartite doctrine of soul: vegetative soul, sentient soul and rational soul. This tripartite division served as a basis for the scholastic doctrine of the soul which sharply separated the rational soul, described as immortal and immaterial, from the vegetative and sentient soul that were assigned to plants and animals. This sharp ontological distinction produced a tension between Neo-Confucian teachings concerning the common origin of all things and Jesuit theology which focused on the unsurpassable divide between human and non-human beings. Thus, it might be somewhat surprising that precisely these three notions are found as illustrating Zhu Xi's views in in a brief but interesting annotation in the *Songyuan xue'an*, an encyclopaedic anthology of Neo-Confucian schools composed in the early Qing period, by Huang Zongxi (1610–1695), Huang Baijia and Quan Zuwang (全祖望, 1705–1755). The annotation in question was added by Huang Baijia at the end of a passage quoting Zhu Xi's reflection upon the cognitive and moral faculties of plants. After being asked why is it that animals seem to possess consciousness while plants seem to be deprived of it, Zhu Xi responded:

> […] while plants cannot be said to possess consciousness, they do have certain intention of life which they can make visible silently. When a plant is injured, it withers and is no longer joyfully vigorous. Also, plants seem to possess some sort of consciousness. Once, I saw a blooming tree, as the morning sun shined upon it, it flourished and had this intention to live that the tree bark could not contain and thus it sprung out by itself. As for the withered branches and old leaves, they show themselves to be wan and sallow, which is probably due to the fact that the vital force has already left them. (Huang Zongxi 2007, 2:1521)

Zhu Xi's response is somewhat hesitant, but it does open a possibility of thinking about plants as sentient or even moral subjects (see Back 2018). The above argument is a good example of the way in which the traditionally human-centred view of Neo-Confucian learning becomes complicated when we look into the world of non-human others. Against a claim that the difference between human and non-human beings lies in the ability of the former to behave in a virtuous manner, Zhu Xi's texts quite often make references to human-like behaviours. This is particularly true with respect to the moral realm, considered to be restricted to humans. The fourth chapter of *Zhuzi yulei* (朱子語類; *Classified Conversations of Master Zhu;* Zhu Xi 2002a), the source of the quote given above, is particularly telling in this respect since it contains examples of virtuous behaviours among wolves and tigers (benevolence and affection towards their parents), bees (loyalty towards the ruler) or otters (ritual sacrifices) (ibid., 14:185). Animal behaviour may thus resemble human nature, as in the case of the benevolent cat biographized by Sima Guang (ibid.,185). As noted above, even plants seem to show at least some traces of virtuous behaviour (ibid., 189–90). The description of plant's semi-conscious response to the environment triggered a more provocative question: does this mean plants are capable of benevolence? To which Zhu Xi answered somewhat vaguely: "We may see that it is wishing for righteousness from the fact that it withers when injured" (ibid., 190).

That plants can be said to strive for righteousness, one of the five Confucian virtues, might seem provocative at the first glance. However, as we shall see Zhu Xi's argument on anthropological difference makes it perfectly plausible to admit a certain degree of virtue even to the least humanlike of beings. Here, more interesting is Huang Baijia's decision to annotate this discussion with a reference to the Aristotelian theory of tripartite soul:

> The Westerners divide humans and other beings into three classes: human beings are the first among the ten thousand things as they possess

> the intellective soul; animals can eat and reproduce and they possess sentient soul; Plants and trees lack cognitive faculties but have vegetative soul. This seems rather correct. (Huang Zongxi 2007, 2:1521)

This passage could be read either as a reaffirmation of the anthropological difference that attests privileged position to human beings amid Zhu Xi's less anthropocentric argument or as a contextualization, which situates the discussion in a broader perspective. It should be stressed that in the *Zhuzi yulei* Zhu Xi's reflection on sentient trees comes after a long presentation of the reasons why humans are uniquely different from any other creatures in their ability to transform and extend their own moral condition. In either case, Huang Baijia's comment marks a very peculiar entanglement between two independent traditions of conceptualizing the anthropological difference. On the one hand the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy epitomized by Zhu Xi's teachings takes anthropological difference as a matter of degree rather than categorical separation, while the European scholastic tradition tends to see human beings as categorically distinguished by virtue of the fact of a rational soul that is presumably lacking in other beings. This difference might also be described by contrasting the explanatory metaphysics prevalent in Neo-Confucian learning, based on moral anthropology and foundational metaphysics, with the scholastic tradition which constructs the anthropological difference on onto-theological premises (see Huang Yong 2022). Taking into account this structural contrast in the way human exceptionality is articulated in the case of Neo-Confucian and "Western" learning, one might be surprised to find that Huang Baijia used "Western" tripartite theory of soul as a contextualization of Zhu Xi's argument in favour of a less clear-cut division between animals and plants.

The annotation might seem even more perplexing if we take into account the lengths to which Jesuit missionaries who introduced the Aristotelian theory of the soul in China went in order to refute the Neo-Confucian response to the question of anthropological difference. According to the scholastic explanation, the non-human other was confined within the limits of the vegetative and sentient soul, which were conceived rather as a function of the organism rather than a separate substance, while human beings were endowed with an eternal soul that was substantially different from the human body. The fact that the Neo-Confucian doctrine assumed a common substance for the body and soul resulted in serious doubts among the Jesuit missionaries as to whether it was possible to express the very idea of soul as it was conceived in Christianity using Chinese vocabulary. This matter was part of a broader discussion revolving around the question as to whether or not the monist tendencies within the Neo-Confucian discourse (as interpreted by the missionaries)

within the Neo-Confucian discourse should be treated as representative of the entire Chinese tradition or as a historical distortion of the original Confucian teachings. However, a more general interpretative issue conditioned any attempt to challenge the Confucian orthodoxy of the late Ming period. Despite hostility towards the Neo-Confucian doctrine, the Jesuits were dependent on the way in which Song commentaries explained the content of the classics. In particular, in the early period of their mission the efforts to promote Christianity among late Ming scholars required a certain degree of accommodation to the Confucian discourse. Conveying the idea of the eternal soul, one of the crucial points in Christian theology, required expressing it through references to the classical Confucian sources, which – as one prominent Jesuit bluntly noticed—were incomprehensible without the aid of commentaries containing Neo-Confucian teachings (see Longobardi 2021, 107). This was also the case in Ricci's presentation of the tripartite soul in the *Tianzhu shiyi*. In order to better comprehend the resonance between the Jesuit exposition of scholastic anthropology and the Neo-Confucian learning a more detailed analysis of Zhu Xi's take on the anthropological difference is needed.

Mind the Gap—How Small is the Anthropological Difference according to Zhu Xi?

For most of the Neo-Confucian scholars the human condition was constituted by a double entanglement with a wider cosmo-ontological edifice in which human beings played the role of creative agent, endowed with the greatest excellence among the myriad things. On the one hand human beings shared a common origin with all things in existence, on the other they operated in a particularly resonant manner "that brings about the completion of the Great Ultimate" (Tu Wei-ming 1971, 80). Neo-Confucian inquiries concerning the specificity of human existence followed Mencius' observation: "That wherein human beings differ from the birds and beasts is but slight"(*Mencius* 2011, 89; 4B19). Assessing this statement from the perspective of a discursive apparatus allows to see that the non-human other played an important role in thinking of some of the themes located at the centre of the Confucian doctrine, such as self-cultivation or emulating the sages. In his study of the early Confucian humanism Eske Møllgaard notes that in Mencius in particular the state of being human is taken as a precarious condition that requires constant cultivation. Without it human life would deteriorate to the level of the "beasts and birds". Taking this observation as a representative of Confucianism in general, Møllgaard calls the set of practices and ideas rendering this preservation of the human condition possible the "anthropological machine"(Møllgaard 2010). The term, borrowed from the Italian thinker Giorgio Agamben, is built around

a claim that that being human is both object and condition of a complex discursive machinery, which produced first and foremost the very difference based on (non-human) otherness that secures the exceptional status of human beings. According to Agamben, a particular feature of the anthropological difference is that while the human being is conceived as fundamentally open-ended and undefined, the animals (non-human others) are limited by their environment, and clearly defined by these limitations (Agamben 2004). In other words, the human condition is located in the very gap that separates human and non-human beings. For Mencius upholding this gap distinguishes nobleman (*junzi* 君子) from common people—an indication of the fact that anthropological difference is a prescriptive rather than descriptive notion. To see how thin the line between human beings and animals is, we may consult Mencius' argument against Yang Zhu's egoism and Mozi's idea of universal care:

> If the ways of Yang and Mo are not stopped, and the way of Confucius is not made known, the people will be deceived by these deviant views, and the path of humaneness and rightness will be blocked. When the path of humaneness and rightness is blocked, animals are led to devour people, and people will be led to devour one another. (*Mencius* 2011, 70; 3B9)

Here, the anthropological difference located in the proper cultivation of the Way is not only an individual task but also a foundation of a properly human life. It is thus a matter of proper social, political and moral conduct rather than a certain set of innate qualities. Zhu Xi's comment on the above passage further elucidates this view by pointing towards the realm of human relations. According to Zhu Xi, Yang Zhu's egoism leaves no space for any form of political order that is organized along relations between rulers and their subjects. In other words, to follow Yang Zhu would mean "to do away with the ruler". Similarly, Mozi's idea of indiscriminate care for others (*jian'ai* 兼愛) makes it impossible to differentiate between one's kin and strangers, and effectively dissolves the relation one has with one's parents, which is based on filial piety (*xiao* 孝). As his commentary explains: "Not having a father and not having a ruler leads to losing the human Way and thus equates with beasts and birds" (Zhu Xi 2002b, 6:331). The relation between subject and ruler and the relation between father and son is one of the staple elements of Confucian moral discourse. As such it constitutes the key factor distinguishing human beings from animals. Zhu Xi therefore explains the passage from Mencius in terms of deterioration of human condition.

However, when we take a closer look at the way this Mencian "anthropological machine" is handled by Zhu Xi, we may notice that while the conceptual focus is

put on the notions that allow us to differentiate between the human and non-human condition, the issue of resemblances amid these differences seems to be constantly present in his argument. In other words, while being human requires constant cultivation which prevents a person from sliding down towards the level of beasts and birds, the beasts and birds possess certain features that are traditionally considered to be reserved for humans alone.

On the one hand Zhu Xi puts a strong emphasis on certain metaphysical preconditions that make human beings unique. The commentary on the Mencius' statement that the difference between human beings and animals is but small brings up a much stronger version of the anthropological difference:

> When people and other beings are born, they commonly obtain the *li* of Heaven and Earth as their nature, and they commonly obtain the *qi* of Heaven and Earth as their shape. Only human beings obtain within this shape *qi* that is upright, and that by means of which they are able to complete their [proper] nature is but small. When it is said that difference is small, in fact all that separates people from other beings is located in this. The multitude of people do not know this and cast it away. Thus, while they are called people, in reality they do not differ from beasts and birds. (Zhu Xi 2002b, 6:358).

While to maintain the condition of being human one needs to cultivate the Confucian virtues, particularly humanness, there is also a specific ontological precondition that makes this cultivation possible: the uprightness of human physical nature. According to Zhu Xi, being human is conditioned by the arrangement of *qi* in a particular, upright manner. This however is possible because *qi*, being the creative and active force, is always qualified by *Li* (the Cosmic Pattern or principle). However, to assume from this that the there is something intrinsically human in the content of this cultivation would miss Zhu Xi's point. The chapter 57 of *Zhuzi yulei* contains an explanation of the Mencian "gap" that is more nuanced than the commentary mentioned above:

> Jing Zhi asked [about the passage from Mencius]: "That whereby man differs from the lower animals is but small". The answer was: "It is Li that is common in people and ten thousand things. Thus, the heart-mind is that by which they differ. The human-mind being an empty numinosity embrace numerous *li* [miles] and there is nothing it does not penetrate. Even if the endowed *qi* is murky, there it can overcome it and make it bright. The heart-mind of ten thousand things, covers a lot of *li* it does not go through, even though there is some uprightness in the *qi* they are

> endowed with, it stops at having one or two paths towards the brightness. If there is care between fathers and sons among the beasts and birds or differentiation into males and females, there is only such one or two paths towards brightness, and other principles of the way are not penetrated or extended further. The human heart-mind, through its lucid transparency extends further. Thus, speaking of its great root, the *Li* is one, and the difference lies in what is endowed with *qi* there." (Zhu Xi 2002c, 15:1838)

According to Zhu Xi, the human heart-mind is open by its very nature. While animals can be said to act morally to a certain degree, they do so in a fixed and limited manner. Human beings on the other hand can respond morally towards a multitude of situations. Furthermore, while people are endowed with *qi* of different clarity, it is the very openness of their heart-mind or their nature that allows them to refine it in a way that animals are presumably unable to. Nevertheless, what is revealed in the moral behaviour of both human and non-human animals is the very same pattern, common to all beings—it is the scope of this practice and its self-referential transformative effect in the case of humans (who, according to Zhu Xi, can overcome their material preconditions) that constitutes the anthropological difference. To put it bluntly, it is much harder for an animal to practice self-cultivation than for a human.

Small Vessels and Sparrows Tied to Trees: Ricci's Depiction of Aristotelian Soul

In the passages presented above we saw how Zhu Xi's views concerning the anthropological difference operate at two levels: moral and ontological. However, this difference is not located in any moral qualifier: beast and birds also engage in virtuous behaviours that are generally considered to be distinctively human—some of them are filial, other adhere to the rulers, some even practice ritual sacrifices. What actually distinguishes human and non-human beings is the penetrative ability of human beings to overcome the limitations of their material conditions and retrieve original pattern, common to all beings. In other words, while human beings remain fundamentally open-ended and undefined, "beast and birds" are considered limited by their environment and confined by their bodily constitution.

When we shift our attention to Ricci, we may notice that he uses references to the classical Confucian themes in order to stress the very same openness constitutive of the human condition. Despite the fact that Ricci's stance towards

Neo-Confucian orthodoxy in his *Tianzhu shiyi* is ambiguous at best (and openly hostile in his writings addressed to European audience) he offered an idea of anthropological difference that resonated with Zhu Xi's argument, at least at the rhetorical level.

The human soul and its faculties are discussed in the third chapter of *Tianzhu shiyi*. Here for the first time three types of soul mentioned by Aristotle are given their proper Chinese names (*shenghun* 生魂, *jiuehun* 覺魂, *linghun* 靈魂), used by Huang Baijia in the comment referred to in the opening section of this paper. Ricci's exposition of the tripartite theory of the soul is presented in the following manner:

> In this world, there are three kinds of souls. The lowest is called the life principle—the vegetative soul. This kind of soul supports vegetation in its growth, and when the vegetation withers the soul is also destroyed. The second class of soul is called the sentient soul. This soul is possessed by birds and beasts. It allows the birds and beasts to be born, to develop and to grow up, and causes their ears and eyes to be able to hear and see, their mouths and noses to be able to taste and smell, and their limbs and bodies to be aware of things, though not to be able to infer truth. When creatures die, their souls are destroyed along with them. The most superior of the souls is called the intellective soul. This is the soul of man, which includes [the powers of] the vegetative soul and the sentient soul. It enables people to grow to maturity; it causes people to be aware of things outside themselves, and it allows people to make inferences as to the nature of things and to distinguish between one principle and another. (Ricci 2016, 119)

Ricci's account is a paraphrase of a fairly straightforward presentation of Aristotle's theory in the earlier text *Tianzhu shilu* by Michel Ruggieri (see Tan Jie 2014, 109). Here it is important to notice that the division does not stress a radical ontological difference between human and non-human life: the intellective soul is not so much something different but rather something more than the sentient and vegetative soul, as it includes and exceeds both.

However, it should be noticed that this weak version of anthropological difference is stated after a much stronger theological claim that humans are unique as they come "out of this world". Ricci's argument is built on the theological premise according to which the human soul is of transcendent, spiritual origin that surpasses the material realm (to which vegetative and sentient souls belong). This material realm or the natural world, inhabited by beasts and birds, is foreign to humans who dwell in it as guests or temporal residents rather than hosts:

> Our home is not in this world, but in the life to come, not among men, but in heaven. We ought to establish our inheritance in that place. This world is the world of birds and beasts, and therefore the bodies of each incline earthwards. Man is born to be a citizen of heaven and therefore his head is lifted heavenwards. It is the birds and beasts that treat this world as their own dwelling place; it should not surprise us, then, that the Lord of Heaven should treat people with greater severity. (Ricci 2016, 117)

The reason why Ricci puts such a strong emphasis on the transcendent origin of the human soul is that he intends to show that the soul is immortal, immaterial and does not perish when the human body dies. Through this the human soul gains a substantial dimension: it is not merely that human beings are more capable than animals, as what makes them special is the spiritual substance that constitutes the soul.

Such an argument put Ricci in a difficult position when discussing religious matters with his Chinese interlocutors. While for Chinese scholars there was no serious problem with the statement that there is a difference between human and non-human beings, it was somewhat perplexing for them that there was some other kind of substance involved in making this difference. This was not a matter of incomprehension but rather discrepancies between the basic cosmo-ontological premises of Western and Chinese philosophical discourses. Where the Chinese saw a single vital force which constituted a multitude of beings that shared a single origin, the Europeans looked for division allowing them to separate the Creator and His Creation, and a substantial difference between the spiritual and material worlds neatly served this purpose (see Janik 2022).

These two layers of argument—one pointing towards substantial difference the other towards specifically human faculties of the rational soul—prepare the ground for Ricci's argument in which he presents a more detailed analysis of the anthropological difference. As the dialogue continues, we find Ricci presenting six arguments to his Chinese interlocutors that illustrate uniqueness of the human soul. The general logic of these examples is that while animals are bound by their corporeality, human existence is radically open:

> [T]he mind of the flesh is like a small utensil/vessel: what it can know is small and limited. It is like a sparrow tied to a tree by a thread. Because of the limitations imposed on it by the thread, it cannot spread its wings and fly high in the sky. Thus, although birds and beasts have awareness, they cannot understand things beyond the world of form and are incapable

> of reflecting on themselves in order to know the condition of their own natures. The [spiritual and] formless mind, however, is most great and comprehensive. There is nowhere it does not penetrate , and it cannot be limited by a small vessel. (Ricci 2016, 131)

It is interesting to observe how Ricci employs his accommodationist strategy of blending together Western learning and Chinese sources. His use of the term "vessel", which is also often translated as "utensil" is a skilful reference to the Confucian tradition. The famous passage in *The Analects* states that "the gentleman is not a vessel" (*The Analects* 2.12) indicating—as many commentators suggest—that he is not bound by a single function or skill and can practice virtue regardless of the conditions he finds himself in. The phrase "small vessel" also appears in *The Analects*, when minister of the state of Qi, Guan Zhong (~ −645 BC) is described by Confucius as a vessel of small capacity (*The Analects* 3.22). According to Zhu Xi this refers to his inability to comprehend and practice the Way as it is described in the Great Learning (namely by cultivating oneself, correcting one's mind, etc.). One might also point towards *Exemplary Figures* (*fayan* 法言) by the renowned Han author Yang Xiong (揚雄, 53 BCE−18 CE) where the passage from *The Analects* is explained by contrasting the small vessel or utensil with a great one, namely one which, like a compass or carpenter's square, allows one to set order within variety of situations. According to Yang Xiong a great utensil refers to a figure who is capable of mastering themselves before mastering others (Yang Xiong 2013, 145). Ricci might have had something similar in mind when opposing the human mind to the small vessel or utensil: at the very end of the related paragraph he notes that the human mind "can also reflect on itself, coming to know the condition of its own nature". Finally, the term *qi* (器), vessel or utensil (and in a more general manner: something particular), can be found in the famous passage from the *Xici* (系辞) commentary on the *Book of Changes*: "that what is above shapes is called, the Way; that what is below shapes is called *qi*, a vessel [or utensil]". There are many possibilities to approach this set of references, but it seems that the term *qi* (器) is located at a particularly fortunate position, which allows Ricci to bind together references to transcendence and anthropocentric psychology with a variety of ideas located at the centre of Chinese textual tradition. The result is a Christian anthropology attuned to the Confucian vocabulary: animals, which are small vessels or utensils, are bound by the particularities of their corporeal existence, while human beings are supposedly capable of transcending these particularities (and thus practicing the Way) by the virtue of their soul that is linked to the transcendent, to the spiritual world (i.e. the world located above the shapes which constitute the bodily form of particular objects).

Conclusion: Anthropological Difference and the World Order

It is commonly acknowledged that the concept of the immortal and immaterial soul introduced by the Jesuits in late Ming China posed a challenge to the Neo-Confucian worldview, oriented around a single-substance universe. However, when the question is articulated in terms of the anthropological difference one may notice a genuine resemblance between the way European and Chinese scholars understood non-human others. Taking Ricci and Zhu Xi as examples, we may see that for both of them the difference between human and non-human beings was located in the radical openness of the human cognitive and moral faculties. They both saw animals as bound by their environment and corporeal nature that narrows the scope of their actions. In both cases this difference was linked with certain metaphysical preconditions, making human beings something profoundly different to animals. Still, these resemblances should not obscure the complexities of the conditions in which the encounter between scholastic and Neo-Confucian discourses took place. Zhu Xi's understanding of the anthropological difference was built upon a moral anthropology that took certain assumptions concerning actual human behaviour as a starting point, while Ricci based his argumentation on theological premises that assumed substantial differences separating the human and non-human realms.

It is important to notice how the encounter with the Neo-Confucian discourse affected Ricci's exposition of the idea of an immortal and immaterial soul. The conceptual transformations involved in rewriting scholastic anthropology into a Confucian idiom opened it to new ways of contextualization, as exemplified by Huang Baijia's annotation discussed in the first section of this paper. One important implication was the inscription of a fixed ontological difference separating human and non-human souls appropriate to scholastic traditions into the Chinese conceptual framework, which focused instead on the dynamic process of constructing this difference. From the Confucian perspective human beings could become animal-like by means of their actions, while some animals on the other hand were clearly endowed with the capacity to act in a way that is humane, even if to a very limited degree. Furthermore, while Ricci's use of the Confucian terminology, such as a small vessel, was restricted to the natural (i.e. non-human) world, the Confucian applications of this term were much broader and included the practical aspects of human existence. While in both cases the aim of arguing in favour of anthropological difference seems to be somewhat different—the recovery and cultivation of human condition in the case of Zhu Xi and separating the soul from the natural realm in case of Ricci—they seem to share a similar vision of an ordered universe attainable by the penetrating inquiry of human mind.

What seems crucial in order to understand the driving-force behind these two apparently similar lines of thought is the counterfactual logic that takes lead each time the possibility of a world without intrinsic order and clear normative divisions is taken into consideration. In a brief, but a significant, discussion on heart-mind of Heaven and Earth Zhu Xi makes a following point:

> If we were to accept what has been said here [i.e., that Heaven and Earth have no heart-mind] it simply meant that there is no place for heart-mind. And if there is no heart-mind, then by necessity oxen would give birth to horses, and peach trees would bloom with plum blossoms. But they have their own fixed [ways]. Master Cheng said: that by which [things are] decided is called emperor, that by which nature and affection [emerge] is called the haven [or heavenly creation]. He formulated this by himself, the heart-mind is the place in which things decide and thus we call heart-mind that by which Heaven and earth gives birth to things. (Zhu Xi 2002a, 14:117)

This image of a chaotic world without any clear distinctions points towards a deeper problem that underlies the anthropological difference in Zhu Xi's writings. Since the human condition is exercised by sincere responsiveness towards the world according to its patterns that the human mind can penetrate, the lack of these patterns (i.e., a situation in which anything can follow from anything else) makes it effectively impossible to practice humanness in any comprehensible form. It is worth comparing this Neo-Confucian image with a similar one found in Ricci's dialogue:

> Objects that lack souls and perception cannot move from their natural habitats by themselves in a regular and orderly manner. If they are to move in a regular and orderly manner, it is necessary that an intelligence external to themselves should come to their aid. Should you suspend a stone in space or place it on water, it is bound to fall until it reaches the ground, unable to move a second time. (...) Now, when we observe the supreme Heaven, we see that it moves from the east, while the heavens of the sun, moon, and stars travel from the west. Without the slightest error, each thing follows the laws proper to it, and each is secure in its own place. If there were no Supreme Lord to control and to exercise authority [over these things], would it be possible to avoid confusion? (Ricci 2016, 49)

What seems to be key argument in both examples is that there is certain instance in the world, which translates the factual into the normative. It is significant that

in both cases the matrix for this instance is political: the heart-mind of the world is called the emperor, the figure securing the universal order of things is called Supreme Lord. In fact, when we look at Mencian argument against Yang Zhu and Mozi we may notice that what is at stake in maintaining the human animal distinction is a proper model of society, where human relations are practiced in a manner that accords with the Way.

These examples point towards a more general question concerning the philosophical notion of otherness, which reveals itself primarily as a normative concept. In the passages quoted above we saw few of such counterfactual illustrations, which resort to help of imagination in order to illustrate the world beyond human comprehension: "people devouring one another", "oxen giving birth to horses", "confusion without anyone to exercise authority"—all these examples point towards certain external world which by the virtue of being detached from human condition becomes fundamentally foreign, a world in-itself so to speak, with no intelligent soul to penetrate it nor sincere heart-mind to resonate with it. Thus, the reason we should think about a discursive device or a machine (to use Agamben's expression) when discussing the anthropological difference is that it allows to see how this set of notions and ideas translates the relation between the human mode of existence and the external world into the language of normativity. As a result of this translation the non-human world becomes inhumane. We may thus risk a hypothesis that the devices constitutive of the anthropological difference serve the purpose of rendering bearable the inhumane condition of nature. Here, inhumanness should be understood in a way so aptly grasped in another great Chinese classic, *Daodejing*: the nature which in its in-humanness treats people like "the straw dogs" (see Lynn 1999, 60), perfectly indifferent towards the thin line of social and cultural constructs that differentiate human and non-human existence. This, however, brings us to a very different set of questions, which could set ground for a wider, comparative investigation into the philosophical peculiarities of the human condition. However, this is an investigation the greatly exceeds the scope of this paper.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Rein Raud: *Being in Flux— A Post-Anthropocentric Ontology of the Self*

*Reviewed by Manuel RIVERA ESPINOZA**

(2021. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, pp. vi+238. ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-4950-4)

The book provides a reading of ontology, consciousness, selfhood, and agency primarily based on the concepts of process and field. By using these concepts as springboards, Rein Raud strives to supply a holistic system of interpretation in which disciplines that are often studied separately—such as metaphysics, ethics, and cognitive science, among others—come instead to be seen as fundamentally interconnected and entangled realms of knowledge and practice. *Being in Flux* consists of four chapters, each dedicated to a different subject.

Chapter 1, titled "Ontology: Some of the Story So Far", works as a diatribe against ontological essentialism, particularly its commitment to the existence of mind-independent, self-identical and continuous "objects". As the author explains, essentialism "has a reifying effect on our view of things, imposing strict borders and clear-cut categories on phenomena that should more appropriately be seen as a flux" (p. 15). Accordingly, he opposes this view because "any essentialist discourse necessarily postulates things about reality that diminish the explanatory power of this discourse, instead of increasing it. Such discourses cannot handle vagueness or spontaneous transformations" (pp. 17–18). In Raud's view, the dynamic nature of reality is such that things possess no essence or substance, but simply "pattern continuity": "the concept of substance describes nothing but an appearance of what a relatively stable pattern has produced for our gaze" (21 n. 4). In this sense, and strictly speaking, things are not objects, because "an object is something identical only to itself at any given moment" (p. 21). Moving away from ontological essentialism and into process philosophy, the author argues that "it is empirically justified to consider the workings of reality as a process to be primary, and its constituents, available as they are to us in a context-free form only as products of our mind, to be secondary" (p. 26). Flirting with multiplicity-centred ontologies,

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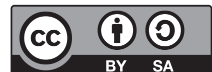

he contends that entities are "embedded" inasmuch as they are engaged in continuous interactions with other entities and their contexts (pp. 26–29). Concepts like excess, emergence, event, and affordance, among others, are thus revisited (pp. 29–42). Based on these vistas, Raud explains that, for all its novelty, the continued commitment of DeLanda and Harman's object-oriented ontology to objects seriously limits its potential for furthering our understanding of reality, particularly its alleged capacity to eschew anthropocentrism, given that objects are necessarily gaze-dependent and thus contingent upon human perception (pp. 38, 41). This leads the author to critically discuss social constructionism and the linguistic turn (pp. 43–48). Although he agrees that language constructs reality, he also notes that "not unlike mirrors, lenses and retinas, language itself is also a part of the reality it seeks to reflect" (p. 47). He then briefly examines Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's assemblages and the relationship between gaze and relationality to conclude that "object-oriented ontologies, old and new, are only able to retain explanatory power as long as we are happy to remain limited by the human perspective on reality" (p. 54).

Chapter 2, titled "An Ontology of Processes and Fields", attempts to offer an alternative to essentialist and object-oriented ontologies. This alternative "does not suffer from many of the deficiencies of the received view and, moreover, has a greater explanatory potential for the elaboration of a non-anthropocentric paradigm of entities and the relations between them" (p. 55). Here the concept of "field" is of utmost importance, and it is defined as "as a configuration of constitutive tensions, including both attractions and repulsions" (p. 56). This definition is also central to the author's understanding of "process" because "every cross-section of every process of any kind at any given moment is best represented as a field" (p. 56). Such an understanding of process differs from traditional process ontology. For example, Alfred North Whitehead's ontology still asserts the existence of "eternal objects"—which he explicitly equates to Platonic forms—and sees processes as mere expressions of them (pp. 57–58), prompting Raud to wonder if "Whitehead's ontology, in the final analysis, really differs from an abstract idealism that would see the flux of reality as not a process per se, but a process of interaction of eternal, self-identical objects" (p. 58). The fact that this distinction between eternal objects and processes is present even in Whitehead's processual metaphysics tells us of the powerful persistence within the Western ontological tradition of a view of reality "which assumes that there are two planes of existence, one housing pure type-variables and the other their token-values, or actual entities" (p. 60). In contradistinction to this two-tiered, hierarchical ontology we find a one-tiered one, or what DeLanda calls a "flat ontology". The author argues that this "view of reality has greater explanatory power than its two-tiered alternatives

simply by not imposing mind-made (or just simply mind- dependent) structures on reality" (p. 61). One way of relinquishing the imposition of such structures is appreciating the existence of gradients and thresholds in the ontological structure of reality. Instead of endorsing the clear-cut distinctions embedded in the configuration of ontological "objects", such as those between animate and inanimate, conscious and unconscious, etc., "we can argue that though neither rock nor milk is alive, milk is closer to life than rock is, and though neither amoebas nor trees are conscious in the same sense as humans are, trees are closer to this state than amoebas" (p. 65). This also involves realizing that these kinds of distinctions are always culture-specific and gaze-dependent. We can still describe the world in terms of "things" or "entities", but "we should only do so while remembering that language has carved these things out of the flow of reality for us, creating 'islands of meaning' (Zerubavel 1993, 6), or chunks of space and/or time, slices of experience that we are henceforth going to see as discrete and self-same objective existents" (pp. 66–67). Relatedly, the relationships between things should be described as "membranic" in nature, in the sense that the borders between them resemble membranes, i.e., they are not discrete but permeable (pp. 70–72). In this way, we are invited to think of entities as "nodes in networks, always blending into other entities in the grey areas on their margins" (p. 77). This can also be expressed by the concept of "field", which is more extensively defined by the author as "a space of constitutive tensions, but also of partially determined undecidedness, of a chaos struggling to organize itself and an order constantly dismantling itself" (p. 80). It is important to note that Raud chooses to speak of undecidedness instead of randomness. The suggestion is that fields and processes do possess a certain structure, what he calls "metapatterns" (pp. 78, 80), but that the specific behaviour of this pattern or structure is never entirely predictable (pp. 80–82). This mirrors the "internality" of processes, namely, their ability to possess a certain degree of insulation from external environs and yet not "be totally contained by impermeable borders." (p. 88) This formulation is designed to deal with the issue of how to "make a distinction between a singular process and the flux of reality as a whole without concomitant reification or presenting them as twin brothers of the 'objects' of traditional ontological discourses" (p. 82). The concept of internality allows to make a distinction between two kinds of change, "reorganization and transformation: the first of these implies a reconfiguration of the processes within the boundaries in a new way; the second, however, involves a reconfiguration of the boundaries that hold the internality together" (pp. 88–89). It is suggested that the latter enjoys a greater degree of undecidedness than the former, leading to a third kind of change, game changers, characterized by their capacity to dramatically change the course of a process/field (pp. 91–94). Finally, understanding that "the universe is neither completely determined nor wholly random" (p. 97) implies reassessing the

nature of causality: Causes do exist but not as linear relationships between clearly distinguishable entities. The membranic and wavering nature of things/processes/fields is such that their causes are necessarily diffused and multiple, synchronic and diachronic, etc. (pp. 100–111).

Chapter 3, titled "Me, myself and my brain", reassesses selfhood and consciousness in light of the abovementioned ontology, particularly the concepts of process and field. Accordingly, the self is seen as an "agentic entity that has processual, but not substance or pattern, continuity", and the self and the mind as a field "constituted by tensions between positions and elements both internal to its flow and external to it" (p. 113). Raud explains that this is a "non-anthropocentric view" of selfhood and consciousness that "will also help to avoid the temptation to think that humans actually have an adequate understanding of themselves, and that the centres of gravity they project into their mind, such as the rational ego-consciousness, are real entities that structurally dominate other entities present in their minds" (p. 114). More precisely, he argues the self/mind is a field in the sense that it is "without a stable condition of balance, an undecided (yet not random) space within which different centres are vying for control" (p. 114). Only one of the centres belongs to "the rational ego-consciousness", the others belong to emotions, sensations, external factors, etc. This implies recognizing the importance of both the bodily and relational aspects of the mind/self (pp. 115–66). Drawing upon the work of Andy Clark, David Chalmers and John Haugeland, the author argues that "our conscious activity does not take place in 'the mind', but only in the process of interaction this mind has with its environment" (p. 117). In this view, places, smells, sounds, etc., are a constitutive part of the structure and functioning of the mind and thus cannot be completely distinguished from mental processes. Accordingly, Raud challenges those that identify the brain with the mind, suggesting that these views fail to appreciate the symbiotic relationship that the brain has with the body and environment (pp. 125–34). He argues that "a more acceptable explanatory strategy would be not to isolate the process of 'thinking' into a strictly neuromental domain, but to consider it as emerging in a relationship between what we call the subject and its reality" (p. 135). Returning to the issue of selfhood, the author quotes Nietzsche's suggestion that "the ego is a plurality of personlike forces" (p. 138). Furthermore, "any of these subsections of the mental field can act as the centre in which decisions are made" (p. 138). In this way, there is not a central, prevailing or ruling force within the self/mind, the self-as-field is defined by continuous shifts between various centres or forces, as each of them attempts to prevail over the other. In other words, we are never solely rational, emotional, sensuous, etc., but all of these at once (pp. 139–40). The field of the mind thus works as a dynamic web of relationships between multiple points, and

each of these points contains and overlaps with each other, and so “the field can also be metaphorically described as holographic in that any particular focal point can recast the entire system of tensions” (p. 144). In this light, a decision “is the recalibrating of the constitutive tensions of the field in such a way that it alters significantly the course of the selfhood process” (p. 147). The author concludes the chapter by summarizing his view of the self: “It is not an enduring and self-same entity or an egocentric particular, but an internality, which is held together by constitutive tensions” (p. 158).

Chapter 4, titled “The Self as an Extended Decision-Making Network”, re-evaluates the nature of human agency. Raud commences by recalling the notion that “the mind itself emerges through the interface of our bodily and sociocultural presence as a part of our whole being” (p. 165). On account of this he suggests that we think and act with our bodies as much as with our minds—a view known as “bodythink”—so that “perhaps the succinctness of a key passage in a philosophical work, or an atypical nastiness exhibited by a fictional character in a crucial scene of a novel do not necessarily result from disembodied mental calculations, but are co-caused by an itch or a back pain of the author?” (p. 166). The implications of this for an understanding of agency are manifold, but most notably it involves distancing ourselves from the notion “that action is to be explained in terms of the intentionality of intentional action” (p. 171), and particularly the view that consciousness initiates all acts and polices the body, as, for example, Benjamin Libet explains. Alternatively, Raud contends that “agency consists in choosing courses of actions that are most consistent with [the self’s] current understanding of its place in the world” (p. 175). More precisely, decision-making works as “the final balance achieved between the constitutive tensions that make up the subject field of the agent” (p. 184). The self, as well as its decision-making process, is extended in the sense that it “is not bounded by my body, but in a significant way extends into its environment” (p. 184). In light of this, the relationship between cognition and action, the nature of responsibility, and the interaction between individual and group agency, among other things, are reassessed (pp. 187—205). All of the above, the author hopes, should lead us to recognize that selfhood and agency emerge “from a multiplicity of heterogeneous causal flows, as nodes within a network of interweaving processes, distributed over the range of processes that we are involved with and that constitute us” (p. 206).

Overall, the book manages to provide an interesting and thought-provoking explanation of ontology, selfhood, consciousness, and agency by way of the systematic deployment of the notions of process and field. Although many of Raud’s arguments might appear to be unoriginal for those familiar with Asian texts and thinkers, they are certainly innovative for, and sometimes openly disruptive of,

the assumptions that guide the mainstream debates about the nature of reality, the self, etc., within the fields of analytic and continental philosophy, and particularly the former. In this sense, the author has achieved what he set out to do at the beginning of his text, namely, to offer a new interpretation of these issues based on a processual and correlative vision. As noted at the start of this review, this approach provides a holistic system of interpretation of both human and extra-human reality.

Mieke Matthyssen: *Ignorance is Bliss—The Chinese Art of Not Knowing*

*Reviewed by Zhipeng GAO**

(2021. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 380. ISBN 9783030739027)

Scholars love knowledge, the bread and butter of their profession. The very term "philosophy" has an etymological root in Greek, *philein sophia*, meaning lover of wisdom. As illustrated in Plato's cave allegory, knowledge is what dispels ignorance and enables us to recognize reality. In the world of scholarship where the acquisition of knowledge is the Holy Grail, who would have thought of taking "ignorance" as a valuable object warranting analysis? Well, Dr. Mieke Matthyssen did, and for compelling reasons.

Matthyssen's monograph has an intriguing title: *Ignorance is Bliss: The Chinese Art of Not Knowing*. The art of not knowing is encapsulated in a pithy Chinese expression: *Nande hutu* (难得糊涂), which literally translates to "Hard to attain muddleheadedness". In practice, *Nande hutu* entails deliberate performance of not knowing, or "playing dumb", for one to cope with challenging circumstances. For example, a government official might pretend not to see corruption so as to keep a distance from it. More than a survival strategy, *Nande hutu* also allows one to maintain moral integrity or even achieve spiritual transcendence. As simple as the notion of *Nande hutu* might appear to be, it requires steadfast self-cultivation in the long run and skilful self-control during social interactions. For all these reasons, *Nande hutu* became a maxim that for centuries inspired Chinese individuals from varied walks of life.

Capturing the sheer complexity of *Nande hutu*, Matthyssen treats it as the entrance into a labyrinth of Chinese philosophy, politics, social relations, and a cultural history spanning from ancient times to today. Appropriate to the scope of her study, Matthyssen applies multidisciplinary methods—including extensive fieldwork, interviews, observation and biography—to collect data. Using these methods, Matthyssen strategically approaches her massive database to juxtapose

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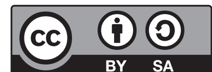

intellectual and social history. On the one hand, she uses classical literary, philosophical and artistic products to establish the core of Chinese culture. On the other, she takes a contextualized, grassroots approach to source data from contemporary bookstores, magazines and online blogs. She also interviewed participants from different sectors of the Chinese society, ranging from students and teachers, blue- and white- collar workers, to academics, businesspersons and officials. The resulting data give us a glimpse into the lived reality of the Chinese today.

In addition to the Introduction and Conclusion, Matthyssen's monograph is divided into two parts. The first part addresses *Nande hutu* in ancient China. According to Matthyssen, Chinese epistemology displayed a tendency towards ambiguity, suggestiveness and vagueness in dealing with knowledge. The action of knowing entails creative, holistic interpretation that is sensitive to the context. Against this backdrop, the ancient Chinese consider the state of *hutu* to complement knowledge in achieving dialectic unity. For example, the Daoist ideal of the sage fool is considered to have the capacity of transcending conventional knowledge and customs. This forms a sharp contrast with Western epistemology, which values clarity and logic as key qualities of truth.

Next, Matthyssen hastens to add that Chinese philosophy was not merely guided by lofty intellectual ideals, as it was as much informed by pragmatic concerns, such as how to maintain order in society. This is where social epistemology enters the picture. Given the rigid hierarchy and corrupt bureaucracy of Chinese feudal society, it was very difficult—if not fatal—for morally upright government officials to be outspoken. This is illustrated by the story of Zheng Banqiao (1693–1765). Zheng was a scholar-artist who made his way into the officialdom but eventually quit out of indignation over widespread corruption. In reflecting on his withdrawal from a promising political career, Zheng wrote the celebrated calligraphy on *Nande hutu*: "Being smart is difficult, being muddleheaded is also difficult. But it is even more difficult to turn from being smart into a muddlehead again. Let go for once! Take a step back! Present peace of mind attained, no need to hope for future rewards." According to Matthyssen, Zheng's explication of *hutu* as a practical wisdom not only harked back to the stories of the Jin-Song poet Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (365–427) and Song poet Su Dongpo 苏东坡 (1073–1101), but also inspired modern thinkers such as Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936). This leads to the second part of the monograph.

In the second part of the monograph, Matthyssen traces the continued application of the art of not knowing in contemporary China. After the communist movement ended in the 1970s, Chinese society still retained many of its old problems: bureaucracy, corruption, and authoritarianism. The effect of these political

problems extends to academia, business and personal lives alike. Against this backdrop, a self-help culture rose, marketing *hutuxue* (the art of being muddle-headed) as a best-selling topic. Handbooks, popular magazines and TV series popularize a wide range of ideas under the umbrella of *hutuxue* to help individuals facing various challenges. Ancient thoughts are rehashed to solve modern problems. For example, it is a common practice for one to play dumb and ignore the frustrations in life in order to maintain one's mental health. Another example would be the deliberate ignorance of problems in interpersonal relations in order to avoid conflict.

However, in spite of many of its proven benefits, *Nande hutu* as a multifaceted practice has indeterminate—and perhaps paradoxical—implications. For example, *Nande hutu* enables spiritual transcendence as well as self-serving behaviour. Due to its flexibility, *Nande hutu* could be co-opted to promote problematic causes. In the early 20th century, thinkers such as Lu Xun had warned against the potential abuse of *Nande hutu* as a form of evasive, opportunistic manoeuvring towards self-advancement at the expense of societal well-being. According to Matthyssen, the contemporary *hutuxue* tacitly promotes two agendas of the nation-state. First, *hutuxue*'s frequent reference to Chinese cultural heritage reinforces nationalist sentiments. Second, under the Chinese government's oppressive practices in the name of maintaining a "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会), the idea of *Nande hutu* is now used to pacify marginalized individuals who could otherwise channel their discontent toward protests. Amid China's propaganda campaign, the practice of not knowing reminds one of "agnotology", a nascent area in the Western sociology of knowledge that studies deliberate, culturally induced ignorance or doubt in the post-truth era. In light of all these troubling signs, according to Matthyssen, appropriate *Nande hutu* cannot be achieved without critical self-reflection and assessment of one's circumstances. Finally, Matthyssen's book concludes with a hidden gem, a postscript by Louise Sundararajan that thematizes the philosophical and social issues underlying *hutu*.

To sum up, Matthyssen's *Ignorance is Bliss: The Chinese Art of Not Knowing* addresses *Nande hutu*, a pithy idea that powerfully penetrates Chinese culture, politics and society from ancient times till today. Matthyssen's treatment of the topic is supported by a massive database and strategic analysis. Meanwhile, her writing is as lucid as it is elegant, creating a highly engaging reader experience, one that makes the three-hundred plus pages flow easily. Overall, Matthyssen's monograph promises to make significant contribution to scholarship related to China, and I recommend it with great enthusiasm.